

A
Study
of
the
Psalms

Honest

GOOD TO

Teacher's Manual



BIBLE CROSSROADS



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HONEST TO GOD

A Study of the Psalms

Teacher's Manual

Bible Crossroads


Bible Way  CRC Publications
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Acknowledgments

The Education Department is grateful to Dan Vander Ark for writing this course in the *Bible Crossroads* series. Dan is a professional teacher and the principal of Holland Christian High School, Holland, Michigan.

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BIBLE WAY  HONEST TO GOD

A Study of the Psalms
Bible Crossroads Series

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INTRODUCTION

This manual is part of the *Bible Crossroads* program, a series of eight church school courses for seventh and eighth graders. See the back of this manual for a complete description of BIBLE WAY materials for junior high students. You'll notice that this is the *Bible Crossroads* course called *Honest to God: A Study of the Psalms*.

A good way to begin your preparation for teaching this course is to set aside time each day to read and reflect on the Psalms. You might also want to pick up and read from one or two of the study helps listed in the bibliography. Working your way into the Psalms will not only offer you new avenues for expressing your deepest feelings to the Lord but will also enable you to listen sympathetically to your seventh and eighth graders as you encourage their personal and spiritual growth. The lessons you'll be teaching are intended to familiarize your students with the Psalms as expressions of trust in God's love and faithfulness and to stimulate them to respond to God with their own feelings, honestly and freely, as the psalm writers did. With its devotional emphasis, we think you'll find this course excellent for study with young adolescents who have grown up in the church as well as with those who may be relative newcomers to church school.

As you teach please keep these general goals in mind:

1. Students will understand the book of Psalms as a collection of faith-full, thought-full, and (especially) feeling-full responses to God, born out of the experiences of his people.
2. Students will become familiar with a number of key psalms and will be able to identify in each the emotional character of the writer's devotional response to God and to his works.
3. Students will reflect on their own relationship to God and his Word.
4. Students will articulate a personal response to God, grounded both in an awareness of their own emotions and in a greater understanding of God's Word and his works.

How to Use Bible Crossroads

Student Resources

If you've taught *Bible Crossroads* before, you'll notice a change in the format of the student resources from separate weekly papers to an attractive student book containing all twelve lessons for the course. You'll want to keep your students' books and store them in your classroom from week to week, distributing them for use during each session. (Having the students put their names on the covers of their books will make this process simple and speedy.) The student book for this course features weekly psalm studies, challenging discussion questions, and a variety of other creative activities aimed at stimulating personal responses to each lesson. Colorful photographs and illustrations help make the book appealing and inviting to junior high students.

Your teacher's manual will provide all the information necessary for using the book in class each week. The book is certainly not intended to be complete in itself but will generally be used in conjunction with other activities indicated in your manual. As you settle into the lessons, you'll find that there is some predictability to your weekly sessions. Each week you'll be studying a psalm (sometimes two) together, answering some questions about it, then responding

to its teaching in a personal way, either by writing or by drawing or with music. You'll notice that a page is set aside in each lesson in the student book for this individual response. (By the way, a classroom supply of pencils, three-by-five-inch cards, and Bibles—we use NIV—will also come in handy.)

You'll notice a section of tear-out pages at the back of the student book. These pages, one per lesson, should be removed and taken home each week by your students. (After teaching lesson 1, make sure your students remove and take home the sheet which accompanies that lesson.) On the take-home sheets you'll find the memory work for the lesson you've just taught, a set of devotionals (from Monday through Saturday) which augment your psalm study of that week's lesson, and the musical presentation of the psalm studied. Encourage your students to use the Scripture readings and questions for their own devotions or as helpful material for family devotions around the table. How much you wish to emphasize home follow-up and study is up to you, of course; but do encourage your students to develop the habit of personal devotions and to build on what you learn from the psalms each week by using the devotional selections that reinforce your classroom teaching and learning.

Teacher's Manual

Before you prepare for lesson 1, spend some time paging through this manual. You'll notice that each lesson begins with a carefully stated concept (Lesson Truth) that forms the core or substance of the lesson. The Lesson Truth contains the heart of what you hope to teach. Use the Lesson Aims to determine whether your students really "caught" the Lesson Truth.

You'll also notice that each lesson is laid out in a step-by-step arrangement. Some of the steps tell you how to use the student book; other steps are independent of the *Crossroads* book, using the cassette tape that accompanies this course, suggesting topics for discussion, or applying the lesson in some way not easily put on paper. All *Crossroads* lessons are planned for a forty-five- to sixty-minute class period. If you have less time than this, you'll have to carefully select which steps and exercises your class can reasonably be expected to complete. If you have less than thirty minutes of class time, teaching *Crossroads* could become frustrating.

The *Crossroads* materials are, at best, tools for you to utilize in reaching your particular students. Some of our Lesson Aims may be too hard or too easy for your class; some of our methods may not be appropriate for one reason or another. As you become more and more experienced in teaching seventh and eighth graders, you will probably find yourself making your own creative variations in the use of this manual and the student books. We've provided a fair number of alternate procedures and optional activities—different ways to accomplish the same objectives. We've also included, for your convenience, the musical presentations of the psalms you'll study together during the course (see back of manual). We hope that you use all of this material—along with your own creative ideas—to make *Crossroads* as interesting and varied as possible.

You'll notice that selected lessons in this course make use of the cassette tape that accompanies this manual. In addition to music, interviews with teenagers, and dramatic readings of psalms and other poetry, the tape contains the musical versions of some of the psalms (23, 38, 137, 42, 100, 150) you'll be studying during the course. Although your teacher's manual will indicate when and how to use the tape, we hope you'll not feel limited by these suggestions. Follow your own hunches and inclinations, using the tape as often as possible to convey to your students the lilt and beauty as well as the message of the poetry of God's people.

In addition to the helpful explanations and insights presented in the Lesson Background section of each lesson, the following books may provide you with some assistance in your planning and preparation each week:

Brandt, Leslie F. *Psalms/Now*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973.
Griggs, Donald L. *Praying and Teaching the Psalms*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984.
Lewis, C. S. *Reflections on the Psalms*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1958.
Ryken, Leland. *The Literature of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974.
Vander Ark, Nelle A. *Sharing from the Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976.

Family Involvement

While your students can and will learn much in your study of the Psalms even if no one from their families takes an interest in what they're doing, support from the home will obviously enhance their learning. We've included a four-page pamphlet that will inform parents about the nature and content of the Psalms course and encourage their support and participation in their children's learning. You'll want to send these pamphlets home with your students the day you teach lesson 1. Or, if you prefer, mail the pamphlets to your students' homes, along with a personal note to their parents. You might want to include some of the following information in your note:

1. location of your classroom
2. beginning and ending times of your session
3. size and age range of your group
4. a request for prayers for you and the students in your class
5. a word about your memory work expectations, along with what other homework you expect your students to do
6. encouragement to use the devotional suggestions (from Monday to Saturday) on the take-home sheets for family worship
7. an invitation to visit (only if you're comfortable with visitors in your classroom)
8. an invitation to open communication (include your phone number if you wish)

Memory Work

Based on the guidelines approved by the Christian Reformed Church Synod of 1980, BIBLE WAY has adopted a memory work policy for its entire curriculum. At each level we encourage students to learn a few longer Scripture passages rather than an isolated text each week. The memorized passages are reviewed at regular intervals throughout the entire curriculum so that children will retain selected parts of Scripture for a long time.

The memory work for this course is taken from psalms the class will study: Psalm 8 (vv. 1-5), Psalm 23, Psalm 51 (vv. 1-2, 10-12), Psalm 84 (vv. 1-4), and Psalm 145 (vv. 1-4). If your students have used BIBLE WAY materials since preschool, they have also memorized part or all of Psalms 24, 46, 100, and 121 over the years. You might want to incorporate a review of these passages into your teaching of the Psalms.

Do try to plan regular opportunities for reviewing the memory work from week to week by providing time for students to write or recite what they've learned. Taking five minutes a week for memory work will help students learn and demonstrate their mastery of these significant passages.

Bible Crossroads and Students with Limited Church Background

If you use *Crossroads* with young people of limited church background, you will have to make many adaptations. Most obviously your pace will be somewhat slower at times: you will need to explain the context of certain Scripture passages and introduce basic terms that may be unfamiliar to students not previously acquainted with the Bible. Also you may want to use some of the alternate procedures suggested in the manual. Family involvement may be absent or considerably less than you'd like; be sure to take that into consideration before making assignments.

Some courses in the *Crossroads* series are easier to teach to students new to the church than are other courses; for example, this course on the Psalms, with its emphasis on everyday feelings and attitudes, is less difficult than those which deal with more abstract themes, such as kingdom and covenant. So, if a number of your students have had no previous religious training, it's important first to decide which courses to teach. We at the Education Department will be glad to advise you on that.

Teaching a class with students of widely varying backgrounds isn't easy. You'll need to be highly selective of these *Crossroads* materials, modifying them or supplementing them with your own creative ideas. You'll have to work extra hard to find ways to help students work together—those who feel they "know it all" with those who've never or seldom heard the good news. If you succeed, you will be rewarded with a class of interested learners who have developed tolerance and appreciation for each other.

A Word about Seventh and Eighth Graders

There's no substitute, of course, for getting to know your students one at a time as the unique and wonderful images of God they are. But age-level characteristics can help you know generally what your students are capable of learning, how they interact with others, and where they are spiritually. To use an analogy: if you had to repair a lamp, a book on electrical wiring probably wouldn't tell you what that lamp looked like inside or what steps you should take to repair it. Such a book just might, however, prevent you from crossing the wires and receiving a painful shock. In the spirit of providing general background information that may be helpful in understanding individuals, we offer the following age-level characteristics:

Intellectual characteristics

Junior high students—often it's difficult to analyze, categorize, much less sympathize with them! They're in transition from childhood to adulthood. Somewhere, probably at widely different points on the developmental continuum, you'll find each of your students taking halting lunges forward and painful slips backward. Consider it normal if the young adolescents in your group vary all the way from the youngster who still enjoys toys to the sophisticated young teen whose thoughts have turned to make-up and boys. All of them will be filled with a goodly share of ambivalence brought about by the tension between the childhood that was and the adulthood that beckons. Effectively reaching and teaching kids at all points in this journey will be your challenge and, we hope, your joy.

Most seventh and eighth graders find themselves in the midst of a physical and mental spurt both exciting and bewildering. Puberty brings rapid changes in body shape and size and an exciting but usually embarrassing sexual maturation. More gradual and not always obvious or confusing to young adolescents is the change in the way they think and reason about themselves and the world around them. No longer limited to concrete experiences from which to draw conclusions about things, the twelve- or thirteen-year-old is beginning to think abstractly, to conceptualize, to understand metaphor, to think logically. It's a heady experience!

To be able to speculate about ideas and propositions, to entertain lots of questions while toying with a variety of answers, opens up a new intellectual world to the junior high student. You're sure to see some flexing of these new powers as your young people apply their emerging adult intelligence to faith questions and answers.

So what does this all mean for the person who loves, humors, and teaches seventh and eighth graders? First, your teaching must go beyond a presentation of facts about the Bible and information about faith. To challenge students inching from childlike thinking toward adult understanding, you'll need to offer more. Many of your students may already know a great deal about the Bible; they need questions that help them put information into concepts that reflect their opinions, not just what they've memorized as children. You'll probably find that your students are quick to point out inconsistencies in what they've seen, heard, and learned about their faith; you'll want to help them see relationships between their weekly learning and their daily living. Because this is the age at which young people become capable of working out their own system of beliefs and values, it is crucial to give loving guidance as they challenge old assumptions and entertain new ideas. (Research indicates that this age group is notorious for "dropping out" of church school.) As church school teacher, your job is to establish a personal relationship with the kids in your group—know what they're seeing, hearing, thinking, and feeling. Then be there to stimulate, to challenge, to guide—and occasionally to pick up the pieces as your young students flutter and falter on their yet flimsy adult "wings."

Social characteristics

Not unrelated to the physical and mental spurt junior high kids experience is a spurt toward independence. Young adolescents struggle with the task of establishing their own identities; many tend to pull gradually away from their families and teachers toward their peer groups. As educator Jerome Kagan puts it:

The early adolescent . . . needs many peers to help him sculpt his beliefs, verify his new conclusions, test his new attitudes against an alien set in order to evaluate their hardiness and obtain support for his new set of fragile assumptions. (Jerome Kagan, "Conception of Early Adolescence," in *Twelve to Sixteen, Early Adolescence*, ed. Robert Coles et al., p. 103)

Wayne Rice, in *Junior High Ministry*, puts it simply: "Friends are the lifeblood of adolescence."

Because young people feel an almost desperate need for acceptance, especially by their peers, conformity becomes the name of the game. (You'll find this pattern predictable enough to be called "normal"!.) Ironically, despite a flurry of social activity, this is the age at which many young people also experience for the first time the low feelings of isolation and loneliness. If you've taught junior high students or been a parent of one, you'll recall (with exasperation, perhaps) the unpredictable emotional ups and downs of your young adolescent, which may have left your relationship hanging by a thread. Their need for affirmation, understanding, and acceptance often appears bottomless, impossible to fill. (Recent research does suggest that the efforts of parents and teachers are not in vain; new surveys indicate that despite the movement of young adolescents toward their friends and peers, families continue to play a vital role in influencing the values and beliefs of their young teenagers.)

But their identity struggle will persist—this too is normal. Though it may manifest itself in ways that startle and irritate adult eyes, ears, and sensitivities (garish fads, abrasive music, exclusive cliques), out of it all will emerge a healthy "self-consciousness." Unlike children, adolescents are able to take the

perspective of other people. This new ability gets its first good workout as the twelve- or thirteen-year-old tries to see herself as other people see her; although she first appears totally self-absorbed, this same ability will eventually blossom into adult-like sensitivity to others.

Knowing a bit about the fragile egos and unpredictable, but intense, emotions of your students will suggest some strategies for teaching and guiding them. You'll want to be fair but flexible, consistent but caring. Establishing some basic rules for maintaining an atmosphere of teaching and learning will be important. Rice proposes inviting the students to help you do this by suggesting a number of possible rules, then paring down the list to arrive at a handful of basics. (You're still sure to encounter rule-breakers who are best dealt with individually, apart from the group.)

Knowing what you do about young adolescents, you'll also want to provide opportunities for group interaction and working together on assignments or projects. (Although eliminating cliques is a pipe dream, you can do much to soften their hurtful effects by how you plan for group interaction in your classroom.) Above all, make sure no one is left out or feels rejected; more than anywhere else, your seventh and eighth graders should feel loved, accepted, and valued within the Christian community.

Spiritual characteristics

A physical spurt, an intellectual spurt, a social spurt. But how about a spiritual spurt? The exciting answer to this question is "Yes! That too!" and therein lies both the challenge and the reward for the junior high church school teacher. The young adolescent has arrived at the place of making commitments in his own right, apart from parents and peers. Because a seventh or eighth grader can engage in higher-level thinking with an understanding of the symbolism and religious language of our faith, he also is able to commit himself to Christ and to understand what it means to live a life of Christian gratitude and obedience. Publicly professing one's faith before the congregation is a very real possibility for some young teenagers. You'll want to gently encourage those who appear ready to take this significant step.

Not that this will be easy! You'll find many of your young people are struggling with doubts and questions about their faith, some tending to reject the faith of their parents and teachers out of rebellion or out of a growing wish to think for themselves. And, although young adolescents are trying out their new reasoning abilities, it is still very difficult for them to integrate their religious beliefs with their everyday attitudes and behaviors. Dealing with their failures in this regard often becomes a heavy load—living Christianly can seem impossible. It will be important for them to hear from you that making a commitment to Christ doesn't have much to do with success as the world defines it. God does not expect or reward perfection. His grace is a gift through Christ . . . a comforting truth for insecure, self-searching adolescents.

As you teach, you'll want to capitalize on a few other characteristics of this age group. In their search for authentic identities, young people are extremely taken with models. David Elkind, noted commentator on childhood and adolescent behavior, suggests that hero worship, taking on the qualities of an admired person, is one way young adolescents establish their own identity. You don't have to be a rock star to take advantage of this process, but do think of yourself as a model. Know what you believe; live it openly; then work hard to be ready to listen, accept, guide, and correct—all while maintaining a healthy sense of humor.

Finally, young adolescents are idealists. They're ready to point out faults and failures at home and in the world, quick to spot injustice, and eager to become involved in worthy causes. Now is the time for the church to recognize and encourage their growing awareness and sensitivity and to channel their energy and enthusiasm by including them as active participants in the worship and work of the church. Your students need to know they're important to God and his church right now. We wish you rich blessings in your ministry and friendship with the seventh and eighth graders in your church.

HONEST TO GOD

1

Memory Work

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not
be in want.
²He makes me lie down in green
pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
³he restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of
righteousness
for his name's sake.

Psalm 23:1-3

Scripture

Psalm 22

Lesson Truth

In the book of Psalms, God's people offer songs and prayers to him as honest expressions of their deepest thoughts and feelings.

Lesson Aims**General:**

Students will realize that God invites his people to express their feelings to him honestly and openly.

Specific:

Students will be able to

- A. describe some feelings they commonly have.
- B. identify intense feelings expressed by the psalmist in Psalm 22.
- C. identify word pictures used by the psalmist to express his feelings.
- D. express to God something they are thinking or feeling at the moment.

**Lesson
Background**

This quarter of *Crossroads* lessons studies the Psalms. Why a course on this Bible book for seventh and eight graders? Because, besides questions of personal identity, life commitment, and the future shape of their personal lives, young people of this age also struggle with a wide variety of emotional states. And since Psalms is the single Bible book that most clearly reflects and boldly expresses those emotions, it can give us the most guidance about the feelings of God's people.

A musician developed a theory that every person has a distinctive pitch. Rap the skull and listen closely, he says, and a sharp-eared person can hear it. But your teenagers, who are still growing, have not yet reached their "pitch," in which the body expresses harmony. They still lack harmony.

Even those young people who by God's grace have made a firm faith commitment and have a reasonably clear understanding of themselves and their world ride a roller coaster of moods. Emotionally, young people of this age group are more changeable than the weather. You, as their teacher, should be fully aware of your students' erratic emotional life and be ready to give Christian guidance in this often neglected area.

Begin with the understanding that Psalms is a feeling-laden section of Scripture. Psalms are, of course, far more than the emotional responses of God's people to the joys and sorrows, triumphs and trials of life. They are songs of faith. They are the hymns of believing people sung before and to their living God. They are the pleas, prayers, and praises addressed to God, rising directly out of the authors' own experiences. The book of Psalms "speaks to God in prayer and it speaks of God in praise—also in profession of faith and trust" (NIV Study Bible, p. 784).

But the unique aspect of this book is its intense emotional expressions. Not that the rest of the Bible is unemotional; remember Moses' anger at the idolatrous Israelites (Ex. 32:19-29), Elijah's fear and despair because of Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-4), Elizabeth's and Mary's joy over the promised babies (Luke 1:39-55), and Jesus' sorrow over Jerusalem (Luke 13:34-35; 19:41-44). As lyric poetry, however, Psalms express the most intense emotions, covering an incredible range from guilt to awe, from depression to exuberance, from defeat to victory. John Calvin wrote in his commentary on Psalms:

I may call this book an anatomy of all parts of the soul, for no one can feel a movement of the Spirit which is not reflected in this mirror. All the sorrows, troubles, fears, doubts, hopes, pains, perplexities, stormy outbreaks by which the hearts of men are tossed, have been here depicted to the very life.

Each of the twelve lessons of this course concentrates on the dominant emotion found in one (or sometimes two) psalm(s). The psalm's content is never reduced to the feeling expressed; rather those feelings are used as a key to lead your students into the faith experience of the poet, a faith that reflects the trust of all God's children and an experience that mirrors the life struggles of every believer.

To teach this course well, you need to be comfortable with your own emotions and ready to talk about them with your students. The psalmists' faith-full thoughts must be communicated through you to these young people. Thus your own personal response is crucial. No one truly understands a psalm unless the words and thoughts reverberate in his or her own soul. So part of your teaching task will be to set the stage by your own personal study and response.

If, like most Reformed people, you have been raised to approach your faith in rational and intellectual terms, remember three things. First, this is a cultural trait, not a biblical one; the heroes of faith are not a catalog of eggheads. Second, the psalms are largely prayers and songs; even among Reformed people these are two vehicles of speech and praise that are empty and lifeless without feeling. Third, your students have likely been fully exposed to an intellectual approach to the faith; a more emotional approach may reach them better by tapping a neglected (by the church) aspect of their being.

A few introductory remarks about the book of Psalms may be helpful. The names "psalm" and "psalter" come from the Hebrew name for the harp strummed while songs were originally sung or declaimed. The Old Testament's own name for them was *tehillim*, meaning "praises."

The psalms are different from the stories, histories, prophecies, gospels, and letters we find in the rest of the Bible. Accordingly, they must be understood and interpreted differently. Without compromising in any way their inspired character, we may not treat them like historical accounts, doctrinal teachings, or evangelistic preaching. Psalms are songs of faith and must be so understood (more about this in later backgrounds).

Psalms is a collection (or rather a collection of five collections) of worship materials. It includes individual prayers (Ps. 3), group prayers (Ps. 12), hymns of praise for God's saving help (Ps. 66), hymns proclaiming God's goodness and greatness (Ps. 19), songs of Zion (Ps. 84), songs about the great king (Ps. 110), liturgical songs (Ps. 24), and teaching songs (Ps. 119). Together they make up a wonderful book of worship, a resource and pattern of prayer and praise for God's people of all ages and all lands.

Psalms are poetry. They are full of metaphors, similes, word pictures and plays, concrete images, and hyperboles. They are doxologies (praises) of the heart, not catechisms of the mind; confessions of faith, not abstract discussion of doctrine.

Psalms are Hebrew poetry. Each language has its own poetic style, and the Hebrew one differs from our own. English poetry is keyed to tonal rhythms and balance of sound; Hebrew poetry uses logical rhythms and balance of thought. The basic literary device in the psalms is parallelism—that is, saying the same thing in different or contrasting words that are grammatically similar:

O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger
or discipline me in your wrath (Ps. 6:1).
Do not fret because of evil men
or be envious of those who do wrong (Ps. 37:1).

While the psalms are no catechism of doctrine, they do present a general teaching about God, human beings, and the relationship between them. This teaching is in full harmony with what we find in the rest of the Old Testament about God's gracious acts in bringing salvation to his chosen people. Peculiar to Psalms is an emphasis on God as the great King and Ruler over all things. Divine sovereignty shines through these praise songs. This King opposes the proud and ruthless and delights in the humble and needy (those who acknowledge their dependence on him). "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 111:20).

The first lesson introduces your students to the study of the psalms by giving them a sense of how sincerely and openly the writers expressed their feelings to God. Hopefully this will encourage your students to trust God's faithfulness by talking to him without pretense, without disguise, without hiding what they truly think and feel. Christians down the ages have learned from the psalmists to speak from the heart to their heavenly Father.

Be alert for any misunderstandings regarding what being "honest to God" (the lesson's title) means. It goes far beyond Polonius's advice to his son, "To your own self be true" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*). Modern pop psychology and values clarification presents personal integrity as the beginning and end of morality. It urges people to say what they truly think and feel, to act so as to reflect their own true self, to destroy any curtain of deceit or veil of false self-presentation—with the idea that doing so makes one fully ethical.

Honesty is a virtue, but it is not the sum of morality. Being true to yourself doesn't justify every word and action. Honest evil is still evil. Being true to a sinful self is inevitably sinful.

The psalmists are not only honest to self but honest to God. When one is fully open and sincere before the living God, there can be no untruth, no constant error, no hidden evil. In God's light everything is clearly seen. God wants us to be honest, not just to ourselves, but more importantly, to him.

The writer of Psalm 22 is honest to God. Without reserve or disguise he cries to the Lord, complaining that he (the Lord) has abandoned him. He openly complains of God's silence and lack of response to his cries for help. He wonders why the Holy One who delivered his fathers does not respond to his own trusting cries. He recites the mocking of his tormentors, describing how they surround him like a pack of dogs, gloating over his looming defeat and scorning his trust in God.

Yet, in spite of his sorry state, in spite of the Lord's silence, the psalmist still trusts that God will rescue him. He even promises that in the future, after he has been saved, he will stand among God's people and urge them to praise the Lord for his deliverance. For God, he deeply believes, is the one who feeds the poor and rules all the people of the earth.

This psalm illustrates another feature of these worship and prayer songs. Many of the psalms are like motion pictures of a believer's thoughts and feelings. They illustrate a movement of thought and feeling, a deepening of understanding, a strengthening of faith. Beginning with genuine feelings of abandonment, the psalmist moves on to a steady trust that God will rescue him and a developing faith that he will finally be able to praise the Lord for his salvation.

Honesty before God leads to greater understanding and faith. Here also Psalm 22 can be a model for you and your students of prayer to God. Even feelings of anger and doubt may be honestly addressed to our Father, for if expressed in faith these lead to a deeper awareness of God's faithful goodness and abiding love.

Does this psalm speak of Christ? Certainly Jesus repeated the first verse of this psalm on the cross, and the entire crucifixion account in Matthew 27 seems to have been written with this psalm in mind (vv. 35, 39, 43, 46). And if the tradition is true that Jews of Jesus' day commonly said the first line of a psalm as a handy reference to the entire song, then the final victory of the resurrection is also reflected in Psalm 22.

We should be careful, however, not to suppose that the psalmist spoke of the Christ in the same way the prophets did. Psalms are first of all "the prayers of God's oppressed 'saints' " coming out of and speaking about their own life experiences. Christ takes all these experiences up into himself as the One who brings all our prayers and praises, all our needs and wishes, perfectly before the Father. So he fulfills them in himself and also gives them back to us as "the enduring prayer book of the people of God" (NIV Study Bible, p. 786).

Materials

Teacher

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Bible
3. Pictures of faces (optional)
4. Tape or tacks (optional)
5. Song (optional), see back of manual

Students

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Three-by-five-inch cards (one per student)
3. Pencils
4. Bibles

Lesson at a Glance

Step 1: Students get to know each other by way of a written exercise (or alternate activity) (10 minutes).
Step 2: Students list their own feelings and see that the Psalms are expressions of the writers' feelings (10 minutes).
Step 3: Students read and discuss Psalm 22 (10 minutes).
Step 4: Students compare a modern version of Psalm 22 with the original (10 minutes).
Step 5: Students receive homework assignment and close with prayer (5 minutes).

Introduction

If this is the first time you are meeting your group of seventh and eighth graders, you'll want to spend some time getting to know each other. Since the lessons that follow are focused in large part on the feelings and emotions we all experience, it will be especially important for you to establish an easy, open atmosphere in which your students feel free to express themselves honestly and without fear of judgment. That's not always an effortless accomplishment when working with young adolescents! So take time today to find out more about each one of your students by asking the group to share information about themselves. That's relatively simple; the harder part—sharing opinions and feelings—will come later in the course.

You may also want to let your students know what you expect of them during this quarter. Save time to explain the quarter plan for memory work. If you'd prefer an alternate to the plan suggested in this manual, you might want to prepare and distribute an outline of the passages you expect the group to master during the next twelve weeks. Be sure also to save a minute or two at the close of your session to look at the devotional handout intended to guide your students into a daily study of the Psalms at home. Encourage your students to make these selections a part of their personal devotions or to use them for family devotions around the table. (It's up to you to decide whether or not you wish to follow up by discussing the questions in class the following week. Be sure to inform the students of your intent.)

Note: To avoid overloading your students with demands and expectations, we suggest you wait until lesson 2 to introduce the writing they'll be asked to do each week.

Step 1

Getting to Know Each Other

Begin your session today by playing a quick round of "Let Me Introduce Myself." Distribute three-by-five-inch cards and pencils to the students and ask them to write a short paragraph about themselves. Make sure they write in the first person (using the pronoun "I") and ask everyone to be truthful but vague—describing some things the others may not already know and trying not to reveal things that will directly give away identities. (Be sure to write a description of yourself as well.) Collect the cards and appoint a reader (or do it yourself). As the reader reads each paragraph, the group should discuss it and guess the writer's identity. The object of the game is to fool the group—and to get to know each other. Incidentally, it should also help you determine how the young people in your class will respond to future writing assignments during the coming quarter.

Alternate Activity

If you and your students already know each other well, you may wish to introduce this new quarter in a different way. Bring to class a selection of pictures (of people) that reflect several different emotional expressions. Close-ups of faces would be especially intriguing. Distribute the pictures among your students and give them time to reflect on what the person pictured might be thinking or

feeling and why. Then give each student an opportunity to show the group his picture and describe the feelings it suggests. Make a colorful collage of feelings by grouping the pictures together on a bulletin board in your classroom. Add a big caption (FEELINGS!) and leave it up for the next several weeks.

Step 2

Discussion: Feelings and the Psalms

Move on to a discussion about feelings by picking up on some of the descriptive statements your students made about themselves. Point out that some people described themselves by listing some personal facts; others introduced themselves by revealing some things they had strong feelings about. (If that did not in fact happen, you'll want to remark that most people in the group described themselves by simply telling about their physical characteristics, things they like to do, and so on. Very few chose to describe their emotions or feelings as a way to tell others who they were.) On the board, make a quick list of feelings students suggested (or hinted at) in the paragraphs they wrote in step 1; then explain to the group that during the next twelve weeks you'll be talking together about a whole range of feelings we all have at different moments in our lives. Invite the group to add to the list of feelings until it includes a wide variety of emotions, both positive and negative. Round out the list yourself, if necessary, so that it appears complete. As you look at the list together, ask students to point out contrasting emotions or feelings. Positive and negative feelings. Highs and lows. Could we call some feelings neutral? Is it wrong to have some of the feelings the group has identified as negative? Keep your discussion brief—just long enough to capture your students' attention and get them thinking about feelings.

Then distribute Bibles and ask everyone to open to the book of Psalms. Tell the group that the Psalms were written by God's people as feeling-full songs, prayers, and poems to God. They are first of all responses of faith to the living God, but since they are responses from the heart, they include thinking, willing, and also feeling. In fact, the feeling aspect is stronger in the Psalms than in almost any other book in the Bible. These feelings are both completely honest and astonishingly varied.

Emphasize that while much of the book contains expressions of praise, joy, and gratitude, God's people didn't hesitate also to express their fear, anger, and sadness to him—with honesty and intensity! If time permits, page through Psalms together, quickly scanning opening verses for examples of different emotional expressions. As you proceed, you might want to call attention to some of the psalms and feelings you'll be studying at greater length in the coming lessons: Psalm 23 (security), Psalm 42 (longing), Psalm 51 (guilt), Psalm 73 (envy), Psalm 77:7-9 (doubt), Psalm 100 (joy), Psalm 104 (awe, wonder), Psalm 137 (sadness), Psalm 145 (praise). Conclude that God does indeed invite and listen to the thoughts and feelings his children bring to him. He welcomes their honesty and openness.

Step 3

Bible Study: Psalm 22

Distribute student books and give the students a few minutes to look at the pictures and read pages 4 and 5. Then turn to page 6 and read Psalm 22 together. Try reading it aloud, assigning each section to a different student. Follow up your reading with a group discussion of the questions on page 7. Here are some guidelines for your conversation about the psalm:

1. Find (underline) several examples (words or phrases) of intense feeling expressed by the writer of Psalm 22 in the first eleven verses.

Accept the students' answers here, following them up by asking the group to imagine circumstances that might cause the psalmist to feel such rejection from God and other people. Take time also to point out that this is the most frequently quoted psalm in the New Testament, especially by the gospel writers. And Jesus himself uses its opening phrases to express the intensity of his feelings on the cross.

2. Summarize each section with a word or phrase that best captures the feeling expressed there.

Accept those suggested by your students.

3. Often the writers of the psalms use word pictures or comparisons to show what their feelings are like. In verses 12-18 of this Psalm, how does the writer picture what he is feeling?

The psalmist uses the following word pictures: bulls encircling him, roaring lions tearing at him, water being poured out, bones being disjointed, his heart turning to wax, a dry gourd, his tongue sticking to the roof of his mouth, dogs surrounding him, evil men encircling him, his hands and feet being pierced, people staring at him, his garments being gambled for.

4. How does the psalmist feel about the people around him? Why? Describe the feeling on which Psalm 22 ends. What does the psalmist vow to do?

The psalmist feels as if everyone is mocking him, scorning him. He feels so lonely that he believes everything around him is meant for evil against him. The psalm ends on a note of praise and worship. The writer vows to speak God's praise in the whole assembly and to tell the next generation about God's rescue.


5. What does this psalm teach us about God? About our feelings?

In your discussion be sure to emphasize God's faithfulness as expressed by the psalmist. In the midst of his deep feelings of rejection, he is anticipating rescue and deliverance . . . because God is faithful to his people. Also point out the intensity and vehemence with which the psalmist pours out to God his feelings of utter rejection. The writer has no fear that his honest expression will put God off or cause him to turn away. Remind the class that God's closeness to his people's needs and feelings is especially evident in the book of Psalms. From the Psalms we know God welcomes the honest expression of our feelings.

Step 4

A Modern Psalm

If you have time, point out "A Psalm for Today," a modern version of Psalm 22. Give your students time to read it to themselves, keeping in mind your earlier conversation about Psalm 22. (Or, if you prefer, read the psalm to the class yourself.) Ask the group to take a few minutes to reflect on the similarities and differences they find in the two versions. Then discuss them together, identifying the modern word pictures (newspapers, armored tanks, machine guns, barbed wire, being "tattooed," X-rays, gas chambers, morphine, an old folks' home, oxygen, etc.) and pointing out the parallels between the two psalms: they both begin and end the same way; both are intensely personal statements; both are filled with pictures of distress and despair; both show the writer vowing, in the end, to praise God for his faithful deliverance from trouble. Conclude your conversation by reminding your students that God's faithfulness is forever. And it is especially reflected in the writings of his people as they pour out their feelings to him. Though the psalms are full of high and low feelings, positive and negative



emotions, the writers usually end with a declaration of praise to God for his unfailing goodness.

Step 5

Closing

Conclude your session by telling your students that during the next several weeks you will be exploring the Psalms together, looking for feelings expressed by its writers and examining your own experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Tell them too that an important part of the course will involve expressing your own feelings to God in a variety of ways—through art, through music, through writing. Encourage the students to be especially aware of their emotional ups and downs this week. Assure them that the God of the Psalms, their God, listens and cares and keeps them in his love.

Remind the group to begin memorizing Psalm 23. Also encourage them to use the suggested readings at home for their own devotional time (see weekly tear-outs at the back of the student books). Then provide time for silent, personal prayer. Encourage your students to identify something in their own lives they feel strongly about and to express it simply and honestly to God. Conclude the prayer time yourself with a statement of praise to God for caring about his people and listening to their feelings.

SECURE IN GOD

2

Memory Work

Students should add verses 4-6 (in dark type) to previous memory work:

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not
be in want.

²He makes me lie down in green
pastures,

he leads me beside quiet waters,

³he restores my soul.

He guides me in paths of
righteousness

for his name's sake.

⁴**Even though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of
death,**

**I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.**

⁵**You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.**

**You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.**

⁶**Surely goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,**

and I will dwell in the house of the

**LORD
forever.**

Psalm 23

Scripture

Psalm 23

Lesson Truth

God is the good shepherd who provides, protects, guides, comforts, and blesses us forever. In him we find true security.

Lesson Aims

General:

Students will learn to be completely dependent on God, who provides all that is necessary for his children.

Specific:

Students will be able to

A. identify some of their own feelings of security and insecurity.

B. explain various ways in which a shepherd provides for the needs of his sheep, as pictured in Psalm 23.

C. describe different ways in which the Lord cares for his people.

D. express to God their own dependence upon his care and protection.

Lesson Background

Psalms 23 is the best known and, for many, the best loved of the 150 psalms. It is a joyful testimony to the utter trust of the author in his shepherd Lord.

It is called "a Psalm of David." These titles and other superscriptions (found over all but thirty-four of the psalms) were added later by collectors and commentators and, according to most Old Testament scholars, are of questionable reliability. Similarly, designations of the occasion a particular psalm was written (as in Psalm 3, "when he fled from his son Absalom") should not be used as the sole basis for interpreting the song's meaning. It's even uncertain whether the Hebrew phrase translated "of" (as in "a Psalm of David") means "written by," "dedicated to," or "concerning." So it would be wise not to make too much of any title or other superscription.

At the same time, recognize that these titles and other superscriptions do reflect very old traditions and the judgments of believers of long ago. They should be valued as such. And we do know that David spent his early years as a shepherd and so could very well have written this song out of his own early experiences.

Psalms 23 is based on a metaphor, the image of the Lord as a shepherd who cares for his people, the sheep. This metaphor is common in Scripture; Jesus himself said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11, 14). Like all good metaphors, it reflects the life experiences of the poet and his listeners. These people knew sheep. They knew them to be stubborn, contrary, dumb, helpless animals. They knew the pains and hardships of a shepherd's life. They knew how vital his careful tending of the sheep was to their welfare.

By contrast, this metaphor does not reflect our own experiences. While they've probably seen a sheep, none of your students have likely tended one. So the challenge is to make this image a living and attractive one for them.

The psalms are full of metaphors and similes. Most are brief phrases: "like the grass evil men will soon wither," "make your righteousness shine like the dawn," or "I have seen a . . . ruthless man flourishing like a green tree (Ps. 37: 2, 6, 35). Psalm 23 is unusual in that the metaphor is extended over the entire psalm (some interpreters say only over the first four verses).

You should resist any temptation to overanalyze or doctrinalize these metaphors. While it is helpful to your students if you explain some of the image's details (such as the use of the shepherd's rod and staff and the meaning of "the valley of death"), don't discuss at length what is meant by "he guides me in paths of righteousness" or on what sort of occasions we might be said to "walk through the valley of the shadow of death."

The power of analogies and metaphors lies not in any detailed teachings we can cull out of (or insert into) them but in their ability to kindle our imaginations, awaken our empathy for the person(s) portrayed, and take root in our own experiences. In Jesus' parables (also long metaphors), we sympathize with the despair of the prodigal son and share his joy on being received by the father he deserted; we feel the outrage of the other servants over the ungrateful wretch who, though forgiven vast sums by their master, threw a fellow servant into jail for a few pennies. So also we should imagine and feel the comfort of the sheep in the shepherd's watchful care.

To teach metaphors well, after briefly explaining the word pictures, encourage your students to feel the impact of the imagery used, to sense what it says of the author, to the listeners, and to us. Ask what it means in a person's life to know,

deep down, that the living, powerful Creator God cares for him or her like a shepherd for his sheep. Give your students a sense of who is included in the metaphor and what mystery of faith it illumines. Mention related symbols and metaphors in the Bible (for instance, husband and wife in Hosea 2 and 3, mother and child in Hosea 11, father and son in Luke 15:11-32, king and guests in Matthew 22:1-14). And, if possible, present some images and analogies from your own and your students' lives. Your goal should be not to present abstract meaning, but to locate the metaphor in the framework of your students' own life experiences.

This lesson presents Psalm 23 as a song of security.

Our North American culture puts adolescents under an incredible strain. We classify them as a separate social group, between children and adults (something other cultures rarely do). We give them no clear rites of passage to mark transition to adulthood and to the responsibilities of full society members. We lack such essential symbols as the African secret rituals, the Roman long toga, the American Indian tests of bravery, or even the Japanese adult's day. The best we provide is the driver's license, profession of faith, and various dating customs.

Add to this the growing breakdown of American families that removes the secure family base for many and the demands of prolonged education that keep adolescents fully or partially dependent on parents for an inordinately long period, and the result is a turbulent and insecure adolescence.

Psychologists tell us that children need to be nurtured in a dependable environment under the steady care of a loving family. If they learn that when they are most helpless, they can depend on those closest to them, children will feel secure enough to develop a natural (for our culture) independence.

Actually no one is truly independent. All of us depend to varying degrees on others. Which of us grow grain, hunt game, or milk a cow for daily food? In our industrial society, we depend on the gas company for heating and cooking fuel, the electric company for light, the police for protection, and so on.

Beyond the complex interdependencies of our age, whether we are aware of it or not, we all depend on God. His providence gives light and rain, the air we breathe and the food we eat. He "makes wars to cease" so that we can live in peace. He provides the ultimate environment in which we can live.

Security is being certain that when and where we need help it will be available. Within the circle of such dependence, we develop a small segment of self-sufficiency. We learn as children to tie our shoes, feed ourselves, keep our rooms clean, and contribute our share to the family's mutual care. This willingness and ability to do things for ourselves and others we call *independence*.

This lesson encourages your students to explore their own feelings of security and insecurity and to see behind such feelings a deeper need for an ultimate safety and stability that comes only to those who trust God's perfect care. It points them to the security of knowing their heavenly Father is a loving shepherd who will provide all they truly need.

Such a sense of final security, expressed by the writer of Psalm 23, is far different from the pathological dependency of some young people and adults. Feeling that they have never been truly loved, some people seek desperately to be indulged and babied, and are themselves incapable of loving others. But the

shepherd in Psalm 23 does not baby his sheep. He cares for them and encourages in them a healthy independence and self-reliance, one that is possible only because they finally depend and rely on their Lord.

The shepherd psalm expresses a serene trust in God's goodness and care that parallels the Heidelberg Catechism's comfort in knowing that I "belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ" (Q & A 1). With such a trust I can walk through troubled waters and dangerous valleys, face bitter enemies and threatening wars or famines, knowing that since my heavenly Father cares for me ". . . surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Materials

Teacher

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Bible
3. *Honest to God* cassette
4. Tape player
5. Song (optional), see back of manual

Students

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Three-by-five-inch cards (one per student)
3. Pencils

Lesson at a Glance

- Step 1: Students write and discuss examples of security and insecurity (10 minutes).
- Step 2: Students read and discuss Psalm 23, using discussion questions as a guide (20-25 minutes).
- Step 3: Students respond to Psalm 23 by writing their own word pictures describing God's care for them (10 minutes).
- Step 4: Students listen to musical version of Psalm 23 on cassette tape as closing prayer (5 minutes).

Introduction

Is there a group more characterized by swings between the distant poles of security and insecurity than the young adolescents you've agreed to teach? Today's lesson offers an opportunity to discuss with your students what it means to feel truly secure amidst the emotional ups and downs that mark the road to adulthood. You'll want to use this session to help your seventh and eighth graders realize that underlying this tension in their lives can be a deep and comforting sense of security, a security that transcends our feelings about ourselves. Your students can begin to sense that true security, even for the most well-adjusted, self-sufficient adult, comes from belonging to the Lord, the shepherd of us all. Your challenge in teaching today's lesson is to help your students create their own images that match the picture of contentment and security sketched by the writer of Psalm 23.

You'll notice that today's lesson makes use of student thinking and writing once again. We suggest you begin the lesson with a short exercise and end with a more thoughtful written response to the lesson truth. You'll want to point out to your students that in most lessons during the quarter you'll be asking them to write. Stress that you want their honest thoughts and feelings and that what they write will remain confidential. (You might also add that, unlike the writing they do in school, their work will not be graded or corrected; it's meant to reflect their thoughts and feelings, not to test their mastery of subject matter.) Make it clear that you expect to read what they've written and perhaps even to share some of it (anonymously, of course) with the group from time to time. It will also be helpful to your students if you take time during the week to write encouraging or

appreciative comments on their writing. Let them know you value their feelings and ideas!

Step 1

Introducing the Lesson

Begin your session today by distributing a three-by-five-inch card and a pencil to each student. Ask everyone to think for a minute or two about what it's like to feel secure . . . to sense that you're all right and your life is going well. Then ask them to write a statement that completes this phrase: I feel really secure and good about myself when I . . . (You might want to write the sentence starter on the board or on a piece of newsprint.) Then ask them to turn their cards over and write about an opposite feeling: insecurity (I feel really insecure—even scared—when I . . .). After the students have had time to think and respond in writing, collect their cards (no names necessary) and quickly read through their responses, adding a few personal examples of things and situations that make you feel secure or insecure. Explain to the group that both kinds of feelings are common—and normal—for all of us. We all long to feel secure and good about ourselves, yet we experience regular reminders that life is never truly secure. We can never depend entirely on ourselves or others to provide absolute security.

Distribute student books and give the group a few minutes to study the illustrations and read pages 10 and 11. Do some of the statements coincide with those your students have made about their own feelings of security and insecurity? You might ask the class which statements best capture feelings they've often had, if not expressed. Then move on to your study of Psalm 23 by telling the group that its writer articulated some of the same feelings you've already talked about together.

Step 2

Bible Study: Psalm 23

Begin by reading the psalm aloud together (and encourage the class to continue memorizing the entire psalm this week). Then provide time (five to ten minutes will be ample) for students to read and reflect on the Discuss/Decide questions on page 13. You may want to divide the class into two or three small groups, assigning each group two or three of the questions for specific consideration when you reconvene to discuss the psalm.

As you work your way through the Discuss/Decide questions with your group, be sure to include some of the following material in your conversation.

1. In what ways is the comparison of God to a shepherd an especially fitting one?

The answer to this question is speculative, but you may wish to raise these points: sheep need a shepherd or they will not survive (they may even be unable to find food!); both people and sheep need a great deal of guidance; both God and the shepherd are providers of care, protection, nourishment, correction; both also are trustworthy and constantly attentive.

2. Underline specific details in the psalm that show it was written by a shepherd.

References to green pastures, to quiet water, to walking on safe paths, to a rod and staff, to providing a table and anointing, and to a "dwelling" suggest that this psalm was written by an experienced shepherd.

Note: If you can obtain the book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, by Philip Keller, you may want to share some of the information it contains with your students. The following are some key illustrations explained by Keller.

green pastures: Shepherds had to search for narrow strips of green grass in the middle of the summer drought.

quiet waters: Because sheep won't drink from a fast-flowing stream, the shepherd must find still water or a spring from which his sheep will willingly drink.

valley of death: Narrow paths along rocky ledges were always a big danger to sheep, and shepherds often had to coax their sheep through especially treacherous areas.

rod and staff: Essential tools of a shepherd's trade, the staff with its crook was used to roughly yank a sheep back onto the path when it strayed into danger, and the rod—a heavy stick—was used to kill attacking snakes and wild animals.

preparing a table: Tablelands are choice grazing areas for sheep, but often contain deadly weeds which must be spotted and carefully removed ahead of time by the shepherd.

anointing: To prevent fighting rams from butting each other to death, the shepherd puts grease or oil on their heads so they will glance off each other, causing little harm.

3. In Psalm 23 David suggests that people, all of us, need . . . (Name as many needs as you can find.)

The psalm suggests that people, like sheep, fear "want," need food and water, are likely to stray off safe paths (and therefore need guidance), fear death, and need assurance of future protection and care.

4. How many times does the poet use "I," "my," "mine," or "me"? What does this tell you about the writer's relationship to the Lord?

The psalmist uses the personal pronoun seventeen times, suggesting that he is intimate with the Lord, needs his care constantly, and dares to honestly and openly admit his dependence on the Lord.

5. Why do you think this psalm, with the exception of the Lord's Prayer, is the best-known passage in the whole Bible?

Most people have an instinctive need to depend on someone for help when they're feeling insecure or troubled. Despite people's outward bravado, everyone needs to lean on someone; believers lean on God. Psalm 23 puts this "leaning" into words that we can all feel and identify with.

6. How does the word picture of a shepherd help you or make it difficult for you to think about God and your relationship to him? Do you have another word picture in mind that is more helpful?

Accept students' answers here, encouraging them to suggest other possible word pictures that describe the protective, loving, and guiding qualities God demonstrates toward his people.

7. List some ways that God cares for your needs each day.

Accept students' answers here, adding to the list those ideas you feel they've overlooked.

8. It's not always easy to find our security in God's care alone. Where else do people tend to search for security? With what results?

Again, accept students' answers, listing on your board a number of things people tend to depend on for a sense of security (ourselves, possessions, athletic ability, intelligence, a good job, other people, popularity, and so forth). Help your students see the shortcomings of searching in such places for security. The little girl's mistaken recitation shows her simple and complete trust in the Lord for all of her needs. (Compare her statement with Jesus' suggestion that our faith must be like a child's! Mark 10:15.)

Step 3

Personal Responses

Ask your students to turn to page 14 in their books. Spend a minute explaining your expectations for their writing each week; tell them that, like the writers of the psalms, they will have an opportunity each week to tell God a bit about what they are thinking or feeling. Encourage the students to be open and straightforward in their writing and stress that you are not interested in perfect form or great length so much as in honest expression. Tell them, too, that you will be looking at their work after each class but that it will remain confidential. If occasionally you do choose to read some of their writing to the group, the authors will not be named.

Explain that for today you would like everyone to think about the word picture in Psalm 23 of a shepherd caring for sheep. What other pictures, more modern perhaps, come to mind when we think about our dependence on God and his loving care for us, his people? (Provide an example to stimulate thinking. The Lord is my . . .) After giving the students a few minutes to think and suggest some ideas, ask them to write their thoughts in their books, beginning with the statement "The Lord is my . . .," then listing three specific ways that God is like the person or thing mentioned. Be ready to help with ideas or questions that will encourage and stimulate the group as they think and write.

Alternate Activity

If this writing assignment seems particularly difficult for your students, consider asking them to draw a picture that shows, in some contemporary and meaningful way, what God's loving, attentive care for us is like. Before distributing markers or colored pencils, spend a few minutes talking about some possibilities. Help your students understand that picturing God's love and our dependence on him, either with words or drawings, is exactly what the writer of Psalm 23 did. Then ask your students to do their drawings in the space provided on page 14 in their books, adding a simple explanatory title to their completed pictures: The Lord is my . . .

Step 4

Closing

If time permits, look together at the two statements on page 15 in the student book. What might the poet have been thinking and feeling at the time? What feelings are expressed in the question and answer from the catechism? Might both statements be made by one person?

Conclude your session in one of the following ways:

1. Play the cassette tape recording of the *Psalter Hymnal's* rendition of Psalm 23. Ask your students to bow their heads and reflect on the words of the psalm as it is sung.
2. Read in unison the words of the psalm as your closing prayer.
3. Ask students to suggest some of their wants and needs for the coming week; then lead the group in closing prayer, specifically asking the good shepherd to lead and guide and keep you in his care.

DOWN AND OUT

3

Memory Work

¹O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all
the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
²From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
Psalm 8:1-2

Scripture

Psalm 38

Lesson Truth

The psalmist honestly and descriptively explains his loneliness, caused by guilt from sinning, and trusts that God will deliver him from his misery.

Lesson Aims

General:

Students will increasingly look to God for comfort as they deal with feelings of rejection and loneliness.

Specific:

Students will be able to

- A. list specific pictures of the psalmist's misery.
- B. explain the cause of the psalmist's suffering.
- C. describe the writer's confidence in God.
- D. describe in (word) pictures their own loneliness or misery.

Lesson Background

Psalm 38 is one of the many (over fifty) songs of lament. This "crying psalm" voices the deeply felt distress of the author (perhaps David) because of his tormenting sickness of body and soul, desertion by friends, and feeling that there is no hope or help for him except from his God.

This is a psalm of deep feeling, and the lesson approaches it in terms of your students' own feelings of loneliness, rejection, and even despair. As you prepare this lesson, it would be well to remember the relationship between feeling and faith.

Faith is from the heart, the root and core of our being. It finds or should find, consequently, expression in every aspect of our living. We must think as believers, will to commit ourselves to the Lord, judge ourselves and others in the light of his Word, act righteously, and relate to other people as God's children. In that broad compass of being Christian, our emotions often get dropped out; they are considered somehow primitive, natural, or uncontrollable, somehow pre-Christian and beneath faith's notice or beyond its guidance.

This is not true. Feelings are an integral and important part of our God-created life. Emotions are not some animal aspect of our being that works naturally and is accordingly free of sin; we sin when we are selfishly angry or carnally lustful. Emotions are not beyond our control; the Bible forbids feelings of coveting and

envying, inferring that we can and must control them. Our emotions are not strictly private and personal; the Lord commands us to be kind and loving to all people and to show this in our actions.

There is an inescapable and undeniable feeling aspect to the life of faith. Anger should be bridled, grief comforted, guilt forgiven, and fear cast out. Christians' feelings must be sanctified along with every other facet of their beings.

To deny our feelings and try to live only in rational terms is to cut off a major part of the faith life. Worship, prayer, and praise become meaningless, and fellowship with fellow believers a gray shadow play.

Emphasize that God is not disgusted or repelled by our human emotions. In Jesus Christ, he shares them. He knows their roots and ranges better than we ourselves do. Before our heavenly Father, as before no friend however close and no family member however loving, we can and should be wholly open and honest about what we feel.

Almost all the lament psalms have five elements:

- an introductory cry to God
- a complaint and description of the author's distress
- a petition for God's help
- a statement of confidence in God
- a vow to praise God

Psalms 38, in five stanzas of four verses each and a concluding two-verse stanza, includes all these elements except the last.

Psalms of lament deal with distressful situations: bad harvests, droughts, enemy attacks, diseases, doubts, enemy mockery, and so on. Psalm 38 is occasioned by a severe illness.

According to Hebrew belief, illness is the result of God's judgment over sin. The psalm gives a word picture of the misery that the author experiences due to his sharing in the human sinful condition. God's arrows pierce him; God's wrath undermines his health; his body is full of pain and discomfort; his strength is failing; his spirit is weakening. Additionally, friends have deserted him and enemies circle round to plot his downfall.

All these ills, according to the psalmist, are due to his sin, but he doesn't identify (perhaps because he cannot) any specific sin that has caused God to discipline him. It seems that it is not a single sin but sinfulness in general that accounts for his suffering and loneliness.

While guilt (the emotion to be studied in lesson 6) is mentioned in verse 4, it does not appear to be the main theme of the psalmist. He experiences also shame, illness, and alienation. Probably the best word to use for this sin-sickness is *misery*. The psalmist is truly miserable.

The feelings your teenage students commonly experience that come closest to such misery are loneliness and rejection. These feelings also should be recognized as a result of the human sinful state they, and their peers share. Loneliness and rejection come from the common meanness, jealousy, unkindness, gossip, hatred, shame, indifference, and insensitivity that sin brings into their lives. Call it misery, and its cause our human sinfulness.

To relieve that sorry state, the psalmist turns to God. He expresses the hope that God will answer those who wait for (trust in) him (v. 15). And he pleads with the Lord to come quickly and help him. The Savior God delivers us not only from the guilt of individual sins we commit but also from the miserable, pervasive sickness of the human fallen condition. Those who trust in the Lord, says the psalmist, will be healed. Those who hope in God will again find joy in life.

Materials:**Teacher**

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Bible
3. Tape or record (optional)
4. *Honest to God* cassette
5. Tape player
6. Song (optional), see back of manual

Students

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Pens or pencils
3. Markers or colored pencils (optional)

**Lesson
at a Glance**

- Step 1: Students discuss teenage suicide and possible reasons for it (10 minutes).
- Step 2: Students read and discuss Psalm 38 together (20-25 minutes).
- Step 3: Students respond by completing sentences dealing with their own feelings of loneliness or isolation (10 minutes).
- Step 4: Students listen to musical version of Psalm 38 on cassette tape and close with prayer (10 minutes).

Introduction

In his book *Junior High Ministry: A Guidebook for the Leading and Teaching of Early Adolescents*, Wayne Rice describes the emotions of junior high students as "completely unpredictable and extremely intense." (By the way, if you're looking for resources for teaching seventh and eighth graders, this book, published by Zondervan, is an excellent one.) For junior high students to fluctuate rapidly between giggles and groans is not atypical. This way of describing students like yours is not particularly startling or profound—you've surely discovered it already in your observation as a teacher or a relative of a young adolescent. But dealing with the emotional ups and downs of a group of young people can be a roller-coaster experience for teachers as well. It's not easy to maintain your own equilibrium each week. However, understanding and patience, consistency and maturity will equip you to listen, to empathize, and to guide. (And a sense of humor will see you through those times when you're sure you're not accomplishing any of the above.)

A word about the relationship between feelings and faith is in order too. Teaching a quarter of lessons so closely tied to the feelings and emotions can have some pitfalls. Your students may not always respond to your invitation to describe their feelings. Unlike high school students, they may simply be unable to articulate their ideas or responses in a logical way. Or, perhaps they fear you (or their classmates) will judge them harshly for what they are thinking and feeling. It will be important for you to reiterate the emphasis of this Psalms course often: God invites and accepts his people's honest expression of their thoughts to him. Help your students understand that our faith never depends on our emotions. We can be sure that God is with us always—even when we feel guilty, ashamed, sad, mad, or scared to death. Certainly God is also with us when we're feeling grateful, worshipful, and joyful, but his presence is not a response to our "highs." Our young people need to know that right now!

Step 1

Introduction to the Lesson

Begin today's session by drawing your students into a discussion about suicide. (Author Wayne Rice states in his book that suicide is currently the number two killer of young people. His research indicates that while suicide has increased 20 percent in recent years, suicide among adolescents, including junior high students, has increased 200 percent. Check page 17 of the student book for further (frightening) facts about teenage suicide. Ask your students to suggest why they think some teenagers contemplate suicide. Make a list of possible reasons on your board: feeling misunderstood, having problems with parents, not doing well in school or sports, being picked on by friends (or enemies), and so forth. Look at your completed list together and ask the students to decide whether there is a common thread running through the reasons they've suggested. With the help of your students, conclude that people often contemplate suicide when they're feeling isolated, cut off from others, lonely, and desperate for attention and caring.

Alternate Activity

You might want to obtain a tape or record of some current music your students are taken with. Look especially for a song (or songs) that expresses loneliness or rejection. Play the music for your group, asking them to listen carefully and then to identify and summarize what the artist is trying to say in the lyrics. Talk about why music with this theme is chosen so often by best-selling artists. Why do people—teenagers especially—seem to love hearing (and buying) it?

Step 2

Bible Study: Psalm 38

Distribute student books and provide time for everyone to look at the illustration and read the introductory material on pages 16 and 17. Then turn to page 18 and read Psalm 38 together. Read it aloud, asking different students to read a few verses each. Follow your reading with a discussion of the questions on page 19, using the notes below to guide your conversation about the psalm.

1. What one word best summarizes how David was feeling when he wrote Psalm 38? Why was he feeling this way?

Accept students' one-word descriptions (miserable, rotten, worthless, down and out, etc.); then conclude that David was feeling burdened by his guilt (v. 4) and troubled by his sin and iniquity (v. 18).

2. What word pictures does David use to describe how lonely and rejected he was feeling?

David describes arrows piercing him, bones decaying, festering sores, being blind, people setting traps for him, his foot slipping, and being unable to hear or speak.

3. Read verses 11-12, 16, and 19-20 again; in these verses David is suffering because of things other people are saying about him. Give some examples from your own experience of how people's words have caused hurt to others or to you.

Accept students' answers here and use them to highlight the feelings of utter loneliness and rejection that result from such treatment by others.

4. What kind of help does David want from the Lord?

David wants to be restored to fellowship with God and relieved of his guilt; he also hints he would like to be restored to a good relationship with his friends again.

5. What does Psalm 38 tell you about David's relationship to the Lord?

Although the psalm hints that David sometimes has been reluctant to confess his guilt to the Lord, it becomes clear that David now feels total permission to bare his soul and express his most intimate feelings. And he is confident of God's forgiving love. David's frequent use of "O" shows intensity both in his suffering and in his belief that God will forgive and deliver him from distress and isolation.

6. Turn the page and read what Psalm 38 says to Leslie Brandt. Underline one or two phrases that express how you sometimes feel. What does Psalm 38 help you understand about God? About yourself?

Invite students to tell the group which phrases strike a familiar note with them. Conclude your conversation by inviting students to describe the picture of a listening God presented in the psalm. Assure your group that they can feel free to express their own deep discouragements and feelings of failure and isolation to him as well. He listens. He restores.

Step 3

Personal Responses

Ask your students to turn to page 21 in their books and spend a few minutes reflecting on how Psalm 38 helps them better understand their own feelings of isolation or loneliness. Here are some sentence starters you might want to write on the board to stimulate your group's thinking and writing. (Remind them that their work will remain confidential, and encourage everyone to write honestly and openly as the psalmist did in today's selection.)

- a. When my friends laugh at me, I feel . . .
- b. When I feel lonely, the first thing I do is to . . .
- c. If I prayed about my loneliness, I would describe it to God with these word pictures: . . . , . . . , . . .

Again, if some students seem reluctant to write, or unable to write, you might want to give them the option of drawing pictures or symbols that represent desperate feelings of loneliness and rejection. Or you might bring to class a photograph or illustration that you think depicts sheer loneliness and, rather than asking your students to make a personal response, invite them to study the illustration and write an interpretation of what the person pictured is thinking and feeling. (And why.)

Alternate activity

Instead of using the above suggestions for writing, you might want to draw your students' attention back to the topic you used to introduce today's lesson: suicide. Ask everyone to reflect for a moment on what David's expression to God in Psalm 38 teaches us about hope amidst feelings of rejection and failure. Then ask the group to imagine themselves trying to express what they've learned to someone who is feeling hopeless and "ready to throw in the towel." Have your students write a "life letter" to such a person, giving reasons for their assurance that life is indeed worth living. If time remains after students have completed their letters, ask for volunteers to read their letters to the rest of the group.

Step 4**Closing**

As you end your time together, remind everyone that David's psalm was a confession to God of lingering guilt, as well as a request for relief from his feelings of loneliness and rejection. Give your students time to bow their heads and confess to God their own feelings of guilt and failure. Then close the prayer time by reading to your students verses 21 and 22 of Psalm 38, concluding with "Amen." (Consider ending your time together by listening to the musical version of Psalm 38 on the cassette tape.)

Note: Lesson 4 will feature the psalmist's response to God, the Creator. You may want to ask your students to bring pictures or items from nature that elicit a response of awe, wonder, and praise.

Memory Work

Students should add verses 3-5 (in dark type) to previous memory work:

¹O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all
the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
²From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger
³**When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,**
⁴**what is man that you are mindful
of him,
the son of man that you care for
him?**
⁵**You made him a little lower than the
heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and
honor.**

Psalm 8:1-5

Scripture

Psalm 104

Lesson Truth

The psalmist describes with specific detail the beauty and utility of God's creation and praises the Creator.

Lesson Aims

General:

Students will be filled with wonder and awe at what God has created and will feel moved to praise him openly and often.

Specific:

Students will be able to

- A. differentiate between worshiping nature and worshiping its Creator.
- B. identify the various cycles of nature highlighted by the psalmist.
- C. list specific pictures the psalmist uses to capture the beauty of creation.
- D. express their own adoration to God for his provision in nature.

Lesson Background

In this lesson you and your students will be studying a psalm that justifies the Hebrew title for this Bible book, "Praises." The great majority of the psalms are confessions, laments, arguments, and even cursings—although all these gain profound meaning from the faith that voiced them and the liturgical context in which they were used—but certain psalms attain a higher level of worship. Standing before our Creator and Lord, believers—in the words of these psalms—look beyond their own needs, guilts, trials, and doubts, and sing a lyric song of praise to the God who does such wonderful things in our world.

Such hymns of adoration take up one or more of the following three themes: they praise God as Sovereign of nature, as Ruler of history, and/or as Lord of Zion. Psalm 104 deals with the first of these three. It is a hymn to the Creator.

In this song the psalmist follows the order of creation as taught in Genesis 1. After a one-verse introduction, this hymn of praise is formed in five stanzas of concentric length (three—five—nine—five—three), a four-verse commentary, a two-verse conclusion, and a three-verse doxology/epilogue. Notice also the variation between directly addressing God (you) and speaking about God (he) to other believers.

The first stanza (vv. 2-4) praises the celestial realm. God is presented as the one who controls nature. He uses it like a garment, a tent, or a building. He stands at the center of the heavens, ruling every feature. The psalmist sees no harmony of natural law, but a harmony of perfect divine ordering and control.

The second stanza (vv. 5-9) describes how God established the earth on its foundations, separating the waters (of chaos) from the solid ground. The poet praises the permanence and abiding quality of this creative act.

The third stanza (vv. 10-18) pictures a glorious garden of life. God provides all this bounty and uses it to fill the needs of each of his creatures, animal and human. All are equally dependent on their Creator's care.

The fourth stanza (vv. 19-23) follows the fourth creation day, lauding the orderly cycle of earthly life with its regular nights and days. Again the psalm portrays the benefits of this order to animals and humans.

The fifth stanza (vv. 24-26) describes the sea and the creatures that live in it. Remarkable here is the sense not only of the sea's usefulness but also of its enjoyment.

The psalm concludes by asserting that all this fragile created life depends for its very breath on God (vv. 27-30), a prayer that this world may continue to please its Creator (vv. 31-32), and a lyric doxology that looks ahead to the time when all evil will be exterminated and God's creation restored to perfection (vv. 33-35).

The overall impression we receive from Psalm 104 is that the Creator is central to his creation. It all revolves around him. It gains its order and purpose from him. There is no shadow of such modern notions as "Mother Nature" or a world mechanism that ticks along by impersonal laws. The creation speaks of the Creator. Aside from him it is empty and lifeless.

Noticeable also is the psalmist's sympathetic descriptions of other creatures—wild donkeys, birds of the air, cattle, lions, storks, whales, and so on. At a time when dangerous wild animals stalked the hills, such an understanding of these creatures as fellow dependents on the Creator's open hand was unusual. Don't let your students confuse this idea with modern romantic notions that every living thing is holy in itself or that life is the highest value. The psalmist rightly places the worth of every creature in its relationship to the mighty Creator.

The creation is wonder-full, not because of its incredible complexity and order—as some modern scientists (Sagan and others) teach—but because of what it reveals about the one who formed and still maintains it. If you can excite in your students something of this biblical sense of wonder at what the Creator has done and is doing in our world, you will have attained the main goal of this lesson.

Don't be daunted by teenagers' learned skepticism. It's often a shell built to cover their own vulnerability. They hide their wonder about things. By making yourself vulnerable and communicating your own sense of awe, you may be able to crack through that shell.

Tell them also that God wants their praise. They know how important for their own sense of self-worth is the praise of parents, teachers, and peers. God carries his worth and dignity in himself; it is not conferred on him by human beings. God has and will establish his name on the earth. He doesn't *need* our praise but he *wants* it. The Lord welcomes our reflections of his glory. He desires the praise of his people. And by praising him, we most truly realize ourselves, for we were created for this end.

Materials

Teacher

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Bible
3. Materials for introducing the lesson (see step 1)
4. *Honest to God* cassette
5. Tape player
6. Song (optional), see back of manual

Students

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Pens or pencils
3. Bibles

Lesson at a Glance

- Step 1: Students are introduced to the theme of God's wonder-full creation by studying specific examples that evoke awe and wonder (10 minutes).
- Step 2: Students listen to and discuss a dramatic reading of "The Creation" (15 minutes).
- Step 3: Students read and discuss Psalm 104 (15-20 minutes).
- Step 4: Students articulate their own responses of wonder and praise (10 minutes).
- Step 5: Students close with prayer and receive assignments for the upcoming week (5 minutes).

Introduction

The junior high years are defined by most experts in adolescent behavior as a significant time of transition. Precariously straddling the worlds of childhood and adulthood, young people often falter as they seek to put away childish things and become independent persons. It's not unusual for seventh and eighth graders to discard indiscriminately all that's connected with the "child" in them as they take enthusiastic steps toward their emerging adulthood. But today's lesson invites them (and reminds us) to slow down and "smell the flowers" along the way. As you view the wonder of God's created world through the eyes of the psalmist, help your young people realize that responding to our Creator with unabashed awe is a mature response that pleases God. Take time to do some childlike wondering as you look around you and some wholehearted worshiping as you enjoy Psalm 104 together.

Step 1

Introduction to the Lesson

Introduce today's lesson emphasis—praising God, the Creator—by doing some wondering with your students. Choose from the following alternatives a means to lead your students to wonder at God's amazing creation.

If you've asked your group to bring wonderful things from nature to class today, spend your opening moments looking at their treasures together. Give each student an opportunity to show the group the object (or picture) he's brought and

to tell a bit about where he found it and what amazes him about its design. (Be sure to bring a few examples of your own to share with the students too.) Use each illustration to point to its Creator and to invite your students to wonder and worship.

If time and weather permit, you might want to meet outdoors for the opening part of your class session. Take a short walk around the building, watching and wondering as you go. You might want to split up and meet back at your starting spot in five or ten minutes. Ask everyone to return with a single object or creature that demonstrates the beauty and uniqueness of God's creation. (You could provide a supply of small plastic bags and glass jars.) Or, instead of collecting things to bring back to your classroom, you might ask each student to come back with something they've sketched or written that shows just one amazing aspect of God's created world.

Rather than having the students bring their own illustrations, you might prefer to bring them yourself—interesting plants, rocks, insects, or shells you've saved, or slides which capture the natural beauty of fascinating places you've visited. Again, use your illustrations to point to the beauty and variety of God's handiwork.

Use pages 22 and 23 of the student book to capture your students' attention and to start them wondering. Distribute student books and give everyone a few minutes to study the intriguing photographs and guess what they depict. Then compare notes by listening to each other's ideas. (Answers are on page 25.) Again, use this exercise to comment on the awesome intricacy and wonderful design all around us in God's created world.

Step 2

Poem "The Creation"

Follow up your opening activity by commenting that throughout the ages people of God have lived in awe of God's amazing created works, expressing their feelings (amazement, fear, wonder, worship, awe) in a variety of ways. Ask the group to listen as you play for them the dramatic reading of "The Creation" by James Weldon Johnson. (See cassette tape that accompanies this quarter. You might want to obtain the words of this popular poem from an anthology.) Afterwards spend a few minutes inviting reactions to the poem. How does the author picture God in the act of creating the world? What feelings on the part of its author does the poem convey? Which phrases or word pictures particularly captured the imagination of your students? How does the poem make you feel about God the Creator?

Step 3

Bible Study: Psalm 104

Turn with your students to page 24 in the student book and read Psalm 104 together, taking note of the spacing breaks between verses. Then work through the Discuss/Decide questions on page 25 together, using the following comments to guide your discussion about the psalm.

1. What evidence does Psalm 104 give that its author has lived very close to nature?

The psalm contains descriptions that can only have been written by someone very familiar with nature. Note particularly verses 10-23: "the wild donkeys quench their thirst," "the stork has its home in the piñe trees," "the high mountains belong to the wild goats," and so on. Each picture shows that the psalmist has actually observed the animals in their natural habitat.

2. What is the difference between the psalmist's feelings about nature and the attitude of a person who worships nature itself?

In every part of the psalm the psalmist first of all praises God for what he has made. Verses 27-30 in particular show the psalmist's clear recognition that all of nature looks to God for every kind of sustenance; God has ordained the cycles of seasons so that he gives attention to all his creatures. The focal point of the psalm is the Creator rather than the objects of his creative work.

3. According to verses 14-15 and 19-23, what is the relationship of humankind to nature? What do these verses suggest about the Creator?

God has ordained that people work during the daytime and rest at night while animals sleep during the day and work at night; neither interferes with or interrupts the other. This shows his purposefulness and his concern for order in the world.

4. What do verses 27-30 tell you about God?

The psalmist acknowledges God not only as the Creator but also as the Provider. God's Spirit infuses all of his creation and provides for each creature at the precise time it needs God's care.

5. Read verses 10-13, 14-15, and 19-23 again. What different cycles found in nature are described here?

In verses 10-13 the psalmist cites the growing season (from springtime to harvest); in verses 14 and 15 he describes the food cycle (from grass to animals to consumable food); in verses 19-23 he speaks of the daily cycle of labor ordained by God.

6. How can you tell the psalmist is excited about God's creation? How does he intend to communicate his enthusiasm to his Creator?

The poet sees all of creation as a blessing from God; and he intends to sing God's praises as long as he lives. If you have time following your discussion of Psalm 104, you might distribute Bibles to your students and spend a few minutes paging through the Psalms in search of other references to God's handiwork in nature. Again, the frequent use of word pictures describing God's created wonders reveals the psalm writers' closeness to nature and their recurring response of awe and wonder at the Creator's ways. Especially point out Psalm 8 (from which the memory work is taken), Psalm 19:1-6, and Psalm 148, as other well-known psalms of creation.

Step 4

Personal Responses

Provide time for your students to make their own responses of wonder and praise to the Creator. Distribute pencils and ask everyone to respond on page 26 in the student book. Today you might simply ask students to think about one thing in nature that has amazed them and stimulated them to praise the Creator (a place of natural beauty they've visited on vacation, a tiny creature or flower they've come upon in an unusual place, or something as commonplace to them as their pet dog or tropical fish). Ask students to write a few descriptive sentences about the created wonder they've chosen and a concluding sentence of praise to God.

Or, if you and your students prefer sentence starters, you might write the following on your board:

I am filled with wonder when I see. . . (name five specific things)
I know God provides for us when I see . . .

Still another possibility for responding to God today: help your students write cinquains (five-line poems) of praise. Explain the structure for their poems as follows:

Line 1 Title (a noun)
Line 2 Describes the title
Line 3 Action words about the title
Line 4 Describes a feeling about the title
Line 5 Refers back to the title

Here's an example you might want to give your students to stimulate their thinking and writing:

God
Inventive, mighty
Fashioning the universe
Praise him! Honor him!
Creator

Step 5

Closing

You might want to end your session by reciting the memory work (Psalm 8:1-5) together as a closing prayer of praise to God. Or you may prefer to praise the Creator with music (see back of manual for Psalm 104 in song). If time remains, you might also want to read through the poem on page 27. Another fitting way to conclude today's lesson might be to ask each student to decide on something specific for which to give God praise. Then pray in turn around the circle and conclude the prayer yourself by asking God to inspire each of you with childlike awe for the amazing way he works in creation.

Distribute home study sheets and call attention to the readings for the coming week, a continuation of your celebration of God's creation.

FEARFUL OR FREE?

5

Memory Work

Students should add verses 6-9 (in dark type) to previous memory work:

¹O LORD, our Lord,
 how majestic is your name in all
 the earth!
You have set your glory
 above the heavens.
²From the lips of children and infants
 you have ordained praise
because of your enemies,
 to silence the foe and the avenger.
³When I consider your heavens,
 the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
 which you have set in place,
⁴what is man that you are mindful
 of him,
 the son of man that you care for
 him?
⁵You made him a little lower than the
 heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and
 honor.
⁶**You made him ruler over the works of
 your hands;
 you put everything under his feet:**
⁷**all flocks and herds,**
 and the beasts of the field,
⁸**the birds of the air,**
 and the fish of the sea,
 all that swim the paths of the seas.
⁹O LORD, our Lord,
 how majestic is your name in all
 the earth!

Psalm 8

Scripture

Psalm 107

Lesson Truth

The psalmist sings praises to God when he remembers how God has delivered his people from their fears.

Lesson Aims

General:

Students will understand that while most of our fears and worries are real, they can ultimately be relieved and resolved by trusting in God.

Specific:

Students will be able to

- A. describe their own fears and discuss them with each other.
- B. identify the fears and feelings of the groups described in Psalm 107.
- C. summarize the Lord's response to each group.
- D. bring their own fears and anxieties to God.

**Lesson
Background**

Psalm 107 praises God for the way he delivers his people in their time of need. The poet describes how the Lord hears the prayers of hungry and thirsty wanderers, suffering prisoners, sick fools, and frightened seafarers. He rescues them all from their distress. The Lord's unfailing love is the hope of all those in trouble.

This psalm was probably used at one of Israel's great religious festivals. Through great dangers and stresses, pilgrims had come from all the corners of the known world and gathered at the temple as "the redeemed of the Lord" (v. 2). In this psalm they thank him for the way he has brought them together and for his enduring goodness and care for his people.

After a brief introduction, the psalm describes four groups of people in distress. In identical phrasing each of these groups are said to have "cried to the Lord in their troubles" and "he delivered them from their distress" (vv. 6, 13, 19, 28). After describing this deliverance, the poet says of each group, "Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men" (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31).

The concluding section (vv. 33-43) relates how God disciplines and restores his people to teach them the wisdom of trusting in his great love, not in their own power or rank.

Your students might find the reference to "fools" (v. 17) confusing. In the psalms, a fool is generally someone who takes no account of God and shows malice toward God's righteous people. In contrast to the wise (v. 43), fools lack discipline and insight. The ancient Hebrews thought that mental and physical illness stemmed from folly. While our modern views of the causes of disease are more scientific, we should not forget that Jesus did associate illness with sin (Luke 5:20). Modern psychiatrists increasingly recognize the psychosomatic roots of many forms of sickness.

In teaching this psalm, we suggest you focus on your students' experiences of distress and fear. The survey shows that they do have such experiences. Besides the general fears listed there, you'll find some students terrified of things that don't seem very frightening to us: speaking before a class, asking or being asked for a date, or failing in some sports event.

We all have fears—even though the macho image affected by some, especially boys, may discourage us from admitting them. Most teachers dream of showing up for class wholly unprepared; preachers are haunted by the idea of stepping into the pulpit with no sermon; salespersons dread making zero sales; ad writers fear being unable to compose a line of good copy. Fears haunt all people, reflecting hidden anxieties.

Of course, the psalmist is talking about more than haunting dreams and repressed fears. He speaks of life-threatening situations, such as being lost and thirsty in the desert, miserable states such as being a prisoner or slave, the deep distress of desperate illness, and the gut-wrenching malaise and terror of a storm at sea. Through all such events, the psalmist says, God is the righteous Judge and loving Lord who controls our human destiny. Salvation is from God.

For your students this means that God frees them not only from shadowy fears but also from the real situations that occasion them. The Lord does not say to us, "Foolish children. That's no ghost beside your bed, only a shadow. There's nothing to fear; it's all in your mind." God indulges in no clever psychological ploys or clever fakery. He doesn't encourage greater self-confidence, suggest we develop thicker callouses on our sensibilities, or prescribe a quick tranquilizer. The Lord takes our distressful and dismaying circumstances seriously. These are evil.

Consider the survey list of the sorts of things young people fear. Many of these are great evils. They show what a frightening and stressful place our world has become. Bad things do happen to reasonably good people.

But God is our Redeemer. He rescues his people out of their distress and heals their diseases, ". . . he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things" (v. 9).

"Let us give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wondrous deeds for men."

Materials

Teacher

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Bible
3. Chalkboard or newsprint
4. Song (optional), see back of manual

Students

1. *Bible Crossroads*
 2. Pens or pencils
 3. Three-by-five-inch cards (one per student)
-

Lesson at a Glance

- Step 1: Students compile a list of their own fears and worries by way of introducing this lesson's theme (10 minutes).
 Step 2: Students read and discuss Psalm 107 (20 minutes).
 Step 3: Students respond to God's faithfulness in freeing them from their fears (10 minutes).
 Step 4: Students close with song or prayer and receive assignment (5 minutes).
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Introduction

"These are the best years of your life! Enjoy them!" Such well-intended cheerfulness on the part of parents and teachers is often lost on young adolescents. Although we tend to look back at our early teenage years as fun-filled and worry-free, our selective memories often screen out the unpleasant and leave us with memories of the light side. Take a few minutes to look back, as the psalmist does in Psalm 107. Reflect on the troubles and fears of your own past, especially of those early adolescent days you spent in junior high. Can you recall at least three things that troubled you as a twelve- or thirteen-year-old—things you feared, things that worried you? Jot them down in preparation for step 1.

An interesting project (called "Young Adolescents and Their Parents") begun by the Search Institute in 1980 sheds some light on the fears and anxieties of young people (fifth grade through ninth grade) in the 80s. Compare your own recollection of teenage concerns with the table on page 33 of the student book. What has changed? What remains the same? As you prepare for today's lesson try to situate yourself in the worry-world of your students. Only when you begin to understand their thoughts and feelings can you also begin to communicate the

message of assurance spoken over and over in the psalms: the Lord's goodness and love never fail. His loving care covers our fears and worries!

Note: For a more complete description of the Search Institute study on young adolescents, see the journal *Religious Education*, Spring 1986.

Step 1

Introducing the Lesson

Begin today's session by distributing student books and asking everyone to turn to pages 28 and 29. Look at the title of today's lesson and tell your students that it has to do with things we fear, things that worry us a lot. Then take a look at the statements of fear or worry printed on pages 28 and 29 and ask the group to circle those that strike a familiar chord—things that also cause them to fear or worry. Distribute three-by-five-inch cards to your students and ask them to list the three things that cause them the greatest fear or anxiety. (No names necessary.) Collect the cards and spend a few minutes looking over the results together. List them on your board, indicating behind each suggestion the number of classmates whose lists included that particular fear or worry. When your list has run its course, turn together to page 33 and look at the results of the Search Institute study. Invite students' reactions. How does your group's list compare with the findings of the survey? Are there some worries that seem greater for your particular class of young people? Conclude by commenting on the range of fears—from the personal and immediate (fear of failing in school or losing friends) to the communal and far-reaching (fear of nuclear destruction). Add, too, that the fears and worries listed are not limited to young people; point out from the list some that you feel too.

Step 2

Bible Study: Psalm 107

Turn to page 30 and direct your students' attention to Psalm 107. Explain that in this psalm, the writer looks back at times when some of God's people experienced great fear in their lives. To understand the psalm best, divide the class into four small groups (two or three students per group). Each group will answer discussion questions about a section of the psalm. Divide up your class and assign each group one set of verses and questions on page 31. Ask the groups to follow these steps to complete their assignment:

1. Read the opening verses (1-3) and the closing verses (33-43) through silently and individually.
2. Choose a group member to read aloud the assigned verses.
3. Answer questions 1-3 together.
4. Choose a spokesperson for your group.

Give the groups at least five or ten minutes to work on their assignments and make yourself available to provide assistance if necessary. When everyone appears to be finished, call the groups back together and ask them to report in turn on their sections. Encourage the students to write in the necessary descriptions for each section so that everyone will have a sketch of all four parts. Conclude your study of the psalm by discussing questions 4-6 with the total group.

Here are some guidelines for your discussion of the entire psalm:

1. Tell who is in trouble and describe their problem.

—**Group 1:** These verses picture travelers or people wandering in a desert—hungry, thirsty, and unable to find their way to a safe place.

—**Group 2:** This section portrays people in prison, sitting chained in the darkness, suffering from hard labor, gloomy and without help.

—**Group 3:** The people described in these verses are ill, near death, afflicted with a sickness that keeps them from eating.

—**Group 4:** The sailors described in this section face terrifying storms that cause them to lose courage; they're at their wits' end, terrified!

2. How do the people in these verses find freedom from their distress and fear?

—**Group 1:** The wanderers cry out to God in their fear and lostness, and God delivers them by leading them to safety, food, water, and a city where they can settle.

—**Group 2:** The prisoners cry out to God in their trouble, and God gives them light and freedom.

—**Group 3:** The sick and afflicted cry to the Lord, and he heals them, rescuing them from the grave.

—**Group 4:** The sailors cry to the Lord, and he calms the storm and leads the ship to a safe port.

3. How do they respond to God's rescue?

In all four episodes those who have been freed from distress and fear respond by giving thanks to God for his unfailing love. Point out the similarities in response by reading together verses 8, 15, 21, and 31.

4. In what ways are the four sections similar?

The pattern of each section is the same: a statement of distress or fear, a plea to God, God's response of freeing and delivering his people from their fearful situation, and a concluding expression of gratitude and praise to God for his unfailing love.

5. Like all psalms, this one is a song. Identify several of its song-like features.

Psalms 107 has four identifiable stanzas (studied by your four small groups); the pattern of each stanza is the same (see question 4); each stanza contains a double refrain or chorus (probably sung by a congregation of worshipers in response to the worship leader or leaders). Students should be able to spot the recurring refrains in verses 6 and 8, 13 and 15, 19 and 21, and 28 and 31.

6. How would you summarize the theme of Psalm 107? Try to put it into a phrase or a sentence that will help you deal with your own fears and worries.

Accept students' answers here, stressing the recurring theme of praising the Lord for rescue from trouble, for freedom from fear and distress.

Step 3

Personal Responses

Provide time for your students to make a personal response to God for his faithfulness in freeing us from our fears. You might want to take another look at your group's list of common fears and worries. Use as an illustration one of the fears shared by several of your students. Ask if God is able to relieve our worry about that particular thing; assure the group that although our fears are normal and understandable, we can feel free to take them to the Lord, asking him for rescue and release. Our fears need not overwhelm and paralyze us. Ask your students to select one or two of their common fears or worries to write about on

students to select one or two of their common fears or worries to write about on page 32 in their student books. You might supply the following sentence starters to give needed structure to their responses:

When I fear . . . (supply personal fear or worry) . . . , I feel as if . . .
When I am overwhelmed by my fear or trouble, I know this about God. . .
When I look back at my life, I remember this time when God rescued me from my fear . . .

Or, for a change of pace from your usual written response, try writing a litany of praise together as a group. First decide on a refrain or recurring response of praise. (You might want to take it directly from Psalm 107: Give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love!) Then take your list of fears or concerns (see step 1) and rephrase them into statements something like these:

Though we worry about how we do in school . . .
Though we fear rejection from friends . . .
Though we're frightened by violence around us . . .
Though the threat of nuclear destruction terrifies us . . .
and so forth.

Follow each statement of fear with the refrain of praise, concluding your litany with "Amen! Amen!" You may wish to write the words and phrases on your board as you go, asking your students to also copy the complete litany in their student books. Your finished prayer will provide a fitting way to conclude today's session as well as subsequent lessons in this quarter.

Alternate Activity

You may wish to have the students write their memory work today in place of their usual written responses to the theme of the lesson. Ask them to use the space on page 32 for writing the verses they've already memorized from Psalm 8 (vv. 1-5) and remind them to finish memorizing the psalm for next week. If you plan to check their memorization of the entire psalm during the next session, be sure to let them know how and when you intend to do that.

Step 4

Closing

Conclude your time together by assuring your students again that God responds to our fears and troubles as certainly as he did to those of his people described in Psalm 107. Encourage the class to make a point of including their worries—no matter how small or private—in their prayers to God this week, asking him to send release and freedom from fear. Then close with prayer, naming some of your common fears (from step 1) and praising God for his unfailing love for you. Or, if you composed a group litany (step 3), use that to end your session. Another possibility: join hands and softly sing the familiar words of "Amazing Grace," or use Psalm 107 set to music. (See back of manual.)

Distribute (or have your students remove from their books) home study sheets and point out that the readings for this week also have to do with fear—and God's way of freeing us from its grip.

GUILTY!

6

Memory Work	<p>¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.</p> <p>²Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Psalm 51:1-2</p>
Scripture	Psalm 51
Lesson Truth	God expects his children to confess their sins to him with complete openness and remorse.
Lesson Aims	<p>General: Students will understand that honest confession of sin and complete trust in God's forgiveness is the only way to overcome guilt.</p> <p>Specific: Students will be able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. relate the events that led to David's confession in Psalm 51.B. identify several requests David makes of the Lord.C. cite evidence of David's complete trust in God's forgiveness.D. confess to God something in their own lives that burdens them with guilt and ask God for cleansing.
Lesson Background	<p>Young people of your students' age level tend to be unrealistic. They expect perfection of themselves; they think they can overcome all obstacles. Then when they fail, it seems to them the end of the world. They feel as if there's no tomorrow. And they are unrealistic also about forgiveness—what it can accomplish and what it can not do.</p> <p>Psalm 51 presents an overpoweringly realistic picture of sin, guilt, and forgiveness. The study of it should help to repair some of your students' unrealistic ideas.</p> <p>While the titles of many psalms are open to question, this song of penitence matches so closely the account of David and Nathan and David's subsequent repentance (2 Sam. 11 and 12) that it is virtually impossible not to understand it in the context of that story.</p> <p>We find in this song a prayer to God that swells up out of a deep spiritual crisis. In utter humility the author cries to the Lord, pleading that God's great compassion (literally, his "tender mercies," the mercy and love a mother has for her newborn child) will wash away his sin. In these opening verses there is a total self-abasement before God balanced by a total confidence that God will hear and answer the psalmist's prayer.</p>

First, the poet speaks of sin as rebellion and revolt against God's law and as transgression or missing the mark, a distortion or twisting of life by which one becomes morally blind and lacks the ability to discern good from evil. In these words it is clear that he takes his own sin very seriously and is fully aware of how heinous and awful an act and state this is.

Second, the psalmist confesses his sin before God. The psalm contains no casual comment about having goofed—as young people often speak of sin—or slipped up, as if it were an unintentional error, or been misled, as if it were someone else's fault. The psalmist has sinned against the living God and done something utterly abhorrent to the divine Judge. He is fully aware of deserving divine condemnation and punishment.

Third, the psalmist believes and knows that God can take away his sin and make him pure and white again. Most young people don't really believe in the possibility or hope of forgiveness and restoration. They don't believe there is life after failure. But this poet knows that God can reknit crushed bones, restore a glad heart, and wipe away sin's ugly stain.

Notice, however, that the psalmist doesn't try to duck the consequences of his sin. We know from the story in 2 Samuel that David accepted as God's righteous judgment the death of the son born of his sinful alliance with Bathsheba. Many young people think that forgiveness means "act as if it never happened." They think a clean slate with God should include a clean record with the law and free sailing in society. Unrealistically, they expect the child born outside of marriage to somehow disappear, the broken friendship to be completely restored, and the record of cheating to be erased from the teacher's memory and grade book. They need to be told that forgiveness from God makes us able to live with the consequences of our sin and begin the healing process. When guilt is taken away, we can begin to bear the burden of our wrongdoing. Since the heart has been made clean, with steadfast spirit we can work to repair the damage done.

The psalmist goes on to picture how his relationships to others have been changed by God's forgiveness. Now he can teach them to turn back from their own sin to the divine Savior and to praise the Lord with heart and lips. He can bring to God the one acceptable sacrifice—"a broken and contrite heart" (v. 17).

This lesson should teach your students an extremely important truth. Modern psychology—especially the pop variety to which they are liberally exposed—dismisses all guilt as counterproductive. Rejecting God as the righteous Judge, it also dismisses feelings of guilt as merely our superego (parents in our soul) trying to knock down our own precious ego.

Psalm 51 teaches us that if we have sinned—and who has not—guilt may be the way to health. It urges us to a true repentance before the Father that will lead to forgiveness and cleansing. Guilt may be the road to peace, as repentance is the road to restoration.

Our God is not far from us or indifferent to our confession. He is the one who hears the humble pleas of his people and restores sinners to joy and gladness. Through repentance, guilt can lead us back to joy.

Materials

Teacher

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Bible
3. *Honest to God* cassette
4. Tape player

5. Glue, tape, or staplers
6. Song (optional), see back of manual

Students

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Pens or pencils

Lesson at a Glance

Step 1: Students are introduced to the theme of guilt by discussing examples of pardon and forgiveness (10 minutes).
Step 2: Students discuss the events leading to David's guilt expressed in Psalm 51 (10 minutes).
Step 3: Students listen to reading of Psalm 51 and discuss (20 minutes).
Step 4: Students reflect on something that makes them feel guilty and on God's forgiveness (10 minutes).
Step 5: Students close with prayer and receive assignment (5 minutes).

Introduction

Self-image, self-esteem, self-worth, being yourself, respecting yourself—and on and on. These catch words and phrases come up in nearly every conversation about teenagers. And they fill whole chapters in thick books on adolescent psychology. Yet today we'll talk with our young people about the concept of guilt. How does it all fit together? Or does it?

It does! And very well. Many twelve- and thirteen-year-olds struggle with feelings of failure and guilt. Still viewing the world largely in terms of black and white, right and wrong, they tend to equate Christian commitment and faith with faultless Christian behavior—temptation-free, discouragement-free, and failure-free. Anything less indicates a lack of commitment; and successful Christian living seems like an impossible dream. Guilt takes over! It's important for your students to hear the gospel message of God's forgiveness today—and to accept it. Only when young people begin to seek and accept the forgiveness God offers his remorseful children, can they truly begin to accept themselves, respect themselves—and be themselves.

Step 1

Introducing the Lesson

Introduce the topic of guilt and forgiveness by telling your students the true story of George Wilson, a bank robber and murderer who was convicted and sentenced to be hanged in 1929. The President of the United States, Andrew Jackson, granted Wilson a pardon; but Wilson refused the President's offer of forgiveness! After some deliberation, the Supreme Court finally decided that if one does not accept an offered pardon, he must pay the penalty. Three days later, Wilson was hanged.

Spend a few minutes talking about this unusual situation. What was Wilson saying by not accepting the President's pardon? Why did he choose to die unforgiven rather than to go on living as a pardoned citizen? Would accepting forgiveness imply guilt or perhaps a remorse he didn't feel? Or perhaps he felt that death was the only way to pay for what he had done! Then, too, maybe he simply couldn't face living with society's attitude toward him once he became a free man. Ask your students why this incident seems so far out or unusual to us. What is the ordinary person's experience with sin and guilt? Ask your students to think for a moment about examples of pardon and forgiveness that follow the norm—examples from the news, from their own experience, or from Scripture. Talk briefly about each example, identifying the guilty party and the gracious forgiver. Conclude by mentioning the feelings that accompany guilt and the contrasting feelings that result from being pardoned or forgiven.

Step 2**Discussion: David's Guilt**

Distribute student books and provide time for everyone to read the introduction to this lesson on pages 34 and 35. If necessary, also take time to read together about David's sin and the subsequent visit he received from the prophet Nathan. (See 2 Samuel 11 and 12. Note that the students have also been assigned these passages for home reading during the coming week.) You may wish to simply ask for a volunteer to summarize the events surrounding David's sin with Bathsheba, his murder of Uriah, and the prophet's visit to sharpen David's conscience and move him to sorrow for his sin. Whatever you choose, do make sure that all of your students understand the context of the guilt David expresses in Psalm 51.

Step 3**Bible Study: Psalm 51**

Turn to page 36 and call your students' attention to Psalm 51 as you explain that it is David's confession of guilt to God and his prayer for forgiveness. Ask the group to listen quietly (and follow along in their books if they wish) as you play the recorded reading of the psalm. (See cassette that accompanies this quarter.) After listening to the psalm, use the Discuss/Decide questions on page 37 to guide your conversation about it. Use the following commentary as needed:

1. In Psalm 51 David does not refer specifically to his sin with Bathsheba or his murder of her husband. What does David consider his greatest offense?

In verse 4 David states clearly that his sin was against God first of all.

2. Underline the requests David makes of the Lord. What does David want most of all from God?

Go through the psalm verse by verse together highlighting the several pleas David makes for God's mercy and cleansing. (You might also want to circle all the verbs David uses.) Point out David's awareness that he cannot escape his guilt until he confesses (v. 3); he knows his guilt is a spiritual disease—he needs inward cleansing, a clean heart. (See how many references to cleansing and starting fresh you can find.)

3. What does David promise the Lord in return for the Lord's cleansing and forgiveness? What attitude will David have to show in order to have his request for pardon granted?

In verses 13-15 David says he will teach other sinners to return to God and he will sing God's praises; to have his request granted he will have to offer to God a "broken and contrite heart." His best gift to God will be a humble spirit.

4. In verses 16 and 17 David talks about sacrifices and forgiveness. What is the relationship he draws between the two?

David acknowledges that God takes no pleasure in burnt offerings made without a remorseful and contrite attitude. God wants first of all to see his children repent, confess their sin, and ask forgiveness. Only then do sacrifices of praise to God become an appropriate response.

5. What evidence can you find in Psalm 51 to suggest that David believes in God's forgiveness? What assurance does this give you?

David addresses God in verse 1 by describing his unfailing love and great compassion. The tone of the psalm also suggests that David has experienced forgiveness in the past and looks to God for it again. Verbs like "renew" and "restore" (vv. 10, 12) suggest David's anticipation—he longs and expects to be right with God again.

6. Does God want us to feel guilt? Are feelings of guilt good or bad? Explain.

This question is somewhat speculative and may elicit some different and interesting opinions from your students. Help them understand that guilt is God's way of leading us to acknowledge our wrongdoings and confess them. But guilt that is harbored and not confessed will prevent us from experiencing the wonderful cleansing and renewal that comes from being forgiven by God.

Step 4

Personal Responses

Again this week provide adequate time for your students to write their responses to today's lesson. We suggest you emphasize the private nature of today's response which asks the student to reflect on something that has caused a burden of guilt in his or her own life. Stress that this assignment is for God's eyes only—you will not be reading or commenting on student work this week. You might also want to consider dismissing your group to the sanctuary or church grounds where they can spread out and find more private space for reflection and writing. Here are some sentence starters to stimulate their thinking and writing:

Something I have difficulty forgiving myself for is . . .

When I think about it, I feel . . .

But I know this about God's unfailing love and compassion . . .

When you return to your classroom, ask your students to turn to page 39 with you and join you in reading the words of 1 John 1:9 aloud. Assure everyone that we may trust these words of God to us just as surely as David claimed God's cleansing in Psalm 51. Then distribute glue, tape, or staplers and ask your students to fasten page 38 tightly over page 39. When God forgives us, he not only cleanses us, but he forgets our sins.

Alternate Activity

You may prefer to have your students spend this time writing Psalm 8, their memory work from the past three lessons, in the space provided on page 38. Or, if you feel that writing confessions as outlined above may be a particularly difficult task for the students in your group, consider having them draw instead. For example, you might ask everyone to draw a picture that represents what guilt and/or forgiveness means to them.

Step 5

Closing

Provide time for silent meditation, asking your students to reflect on what they've written about their personal guilt. Conclude the prayer yourself, asking God to forgive, to cleanse, to renew, and to give each person in your group the joyous feeling that comes from his gracious forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Distribute home study sheets and point out that the memory work is the opening verses of David's plea to God in Psalm 51.

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

7

Memory Work

- ¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within
me.
- ¹¹Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
- ¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to
sustain me.

Psalm 51:10-12

Scripture

Psalm 42 and Psalm 43

Lesson Truth

True joy and contentment come from being in a close relationship with God; feeling deprived of that closeness makes the Christian feel "thirsty" for God.

Lesson Aims

General:

Students will sense within themselves a growing need for a close, day-by-day relationship with God.

Specific:

Students will be able to

- A. describe some of their longings.
- B. tell what the psalmist longed for.
- C. identify verses which show the psalmist's alternating moods of longing and trust.
- D. express to God their need for closeness with him.

Lesson Background

We tend to suppose that only elderly people share the feelings of the writer of Psalms 42 and 43. Typically our society divides life into four segments: childhood—a time for exploring the world; youth—a time of searching for self; middle age—a time for striving to succeed in the world; old age—a time of longing for God. The Buddhists also reserve the last segment of life for religion.

Certainly these psalms (or this psalm, since the two were originally a single song—see the repeated chorus in 42:5, 11 and 43:5) do have a deep appeal for older Christians. The memory of earlier joyful worship (42:4) and the yearning to be in God's temple (43:3-4) seem to express such mature experiences. Still the themes of persecution (42:3), oppression (42:9-10), and betrayal (43:1-2) seem to speak of a person in the strong middle years. And the heartfelt longing and desperate need seem to mirror the sort of unfettered emotion and intense yearning that young people often feel.

This psalm is a song for all ages; people at all times of life need to meet with God and find the joy and consolation of his presence.

The psalm speaks of longing, of thirsting, of yearning for God. It uses a strong symbol to express this: a deer, fleeing from pursuing hunters, desperate with fear and thirst, longing for the relief and refuge of the watering place.

There is a contrast in the opening verses between dryness—an image of spiritual despair, hopelessness, and lostness—and water—an image of spiritual renewal and salvation. Remember this poem was written by someone who had lived in desert country, knew how it felt to be truly thirsty, and recognized water as the source of life and well-being. Many biblical prophecies end with a picture of the restored relationship to God as a flowing river; they refer to the new Jerusalem as a stream in the desert and to salvation as drawing water from a deep well.

Calvin spoke of a "sense of the divine" present in every person that makes them seek, often unknowingly and without clear direction, for the Creator God. Augustine wrote of how the human heart is restless until it finds rest in God. But the longing expressed by this psalmist is not such an inbred, largely unaware, vague longing. This is rather the yearning of a child of God who knows the joy of meeting with the living Lord, who has joined "the procession to the house of God" and heard the shouts of joy of "the festive throng," who has stood before the altar of God and praised him "with the harp." This is the yearning of a covenant child who finds himself far from God's people and temple. It expresses the longings of a full believer.

This feeling may be beyond your students—still young in faith—or it may express also their longing as those born and raised within the covenant bond.

The lesson suggests you approach this psalm through a survey of students' values. Such a survey will help your class to begin thinking about what they want in life. But you should realize that the "wants" of young people are often superficial, formed more from ads and movie images than from their heart's needs.

The psalmist knows his needs. He does not talk about God as someone he would sort of like to be with and visit occasionally. He doesn't express a traditional sentimental longing, as for a family gathering at Thanksgiving or for a school homecoming. Rather he speaks of a need that dominates his being, a hunger so strong that food seems tasteless, a thirst so powerful that his body literally shrivels with longing. The need to be with God is like an agony in his bones. Like someone lost in the desert, yet knowing where he wants to go and where he will find refuge, the writer of this poem feels his relationship with God, though stretched by a long separation, has not been broken. He knows whom he needs. He longs to be in God's presence and God's house for he knows that there his hunger will be satisfied and his thirst quenched.

In tension with this theme of longing is a theme of hope. The psalmist voices a confident trust that "I will yet praise him" and an assurance that God is his rock and stronghold. As the psalm progresses, the psalmist's confidence clearly becomes stronger until it dominates the last section (43:1-5). The temple worship that was earlier a sorrowful remembrance (42:4) has become a joyful anticipation (43:4). The note of the refrain has changed from a hope in despair to a triumphant hope.

As was mentioned earlier, Psalms 42 and 43, although separated in our English Bibles (and in the Septuagint), are clearly a single song and prayer. Not only do they share common themes but their structure is closely parallel. Why then do we find this song divided into two? We don't know. Probably because the latter part had a different liturgical function. Just as we often take part of a psalm and form it into a separate hymn, so the ancient liturgists often made the last stanza, with its triumphant tone, into a separate worship song.

This song was evidently written by a former temple worship leader now in exile in an ungodly nation (43:1). The Sons of Korah probably refers to a Levitical choir made up of descendents of Korah, whom David appointed to serve in the temple liturgy. Eleven psalms are inscribed to these same people (42-44, 84-85, 87-88). The three stanzas of this psalm are composed of four verses each, followed by an identical refrain. Only the second stanza has an additional verse (v. 8) that injects a note of hope in God's love.

This is a song of religious yearning. Where many psalms express profoundly human feelings of loneliness, fear, and guilt, this psalm speaks of spiritual feelings. It expresses a maturity—not so much of age as of spiritual life.

Materials

Teacher

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Bible
3. *Honest to God* cassette
4. Tape player
5. Song (optional), see back of manual

Students

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Three-by-five-inch cards (one per person)
3. Colored pencils or markers

Lesson at a Glance

- Step 1: Students compare their values with those of the Search Institute study (10-15 minutes).
- Step 2: Students study and discuss Psalms 42 and 43 (20 minutes).
- Step 3: Students write prayers expressing their own longing for closeness with God (15 minutes).
- Step 4: Students review memory work version of Psalm 42 and close with prayer (10 minutes).

Introduction

Do young adolescents care about their relationship with God? Will today's psalm lesson about longing, even thirsting for God touch your young students' hearts? Before concluding, as many adults do, that young people care very little about their own spirituality, consider some evidence to the contrary. A survey by Merton Strommen during the 1960s led him to conclude that young people do indeed care very much about their relationship to God. Here are some remarkable findings:

In one large denomination, 63 percent of the teenage respondents reported a perception that they were somehow estranged from God.

Fully 50 percent in this same survey claimed that their concern over this perceived state of their relationship with God was acute, as they felt isolated and without a sense of life's purpose and meaning.

In an ecumenical grouping, 43 percent of the adolescents surveyed reported a strong desire to find a deep faith in God; accompanying this was a reported feeling of distress that they did not feel close enough to Christ.

(Merton P. Strommen, *Five Cries of Youth*. New York: Harper Row, 1974, p. 114)

Such evidence (note also the survey referred to on page 44 of the student book) suggests that young people are indeed struggling with strong and real feelings about their own relationship with God; they are searching ("thirsting" might be a

better word!) for a sense of God's presence with them. That they desire greater closeness to God and deeper faith in him makes your personal example and your teaching of today's lesson very important to the young people in your class. We hope you will be challenged through this lesson to influence your students' developing spirituality and to provide direction for them in their quest for an intimate relationship with God.

Step 1

Introducing the Lesson

Begin today's lesson in much the same way in which you began lesson 5—by making use of the Search Institute study on young adolescents. Turn with your students to page 41 in the student book. Explain that the statements there all reflect things that young people (fifth through ninth graders) value, things they want most in life. Give the group time to read the statements and check those wants or values that apply to them. Then distribute a three-by-five-inch card to each student. Ask each student to select three values from the list that seem more important than the others and list them on the card in order of importance. Encourage your students to reflect seriously on who they are and what is important to them; assure them that their lists will not be used beyond today's class session (no names necessary).

When everyone has finished, collect the cards and spend a few minutes looking over the results together. List them on your board, indicating behind each statement the number of classmates whose lists also included that particular want or value. When your list has run its course, turn together to page 44 and look at the results of the Search Institute study. Invite students' reactions. How does your group's list compare with the findings of the survey? Are there things your students value more (or less) than the young people surveyed? Take time to point out the different kinds of values included in the list: some describe things we'd like to have (good jobs, fun, good times, clothes, athletic ability, etc.) while others describe our deep-down needs (for understanding, for people who care about us, for a sense of safety and security, for meaningful family relationships, etc.). Conclude by pointing out the value ranked ninth in the survey findings: to have God at the center of my life. How does this value differ from all the others? How many students in your group included it as something they want most in life? Explain to the group that if the writer of the psalms you'll study today had done this simple exercise, he surely would have ranked this statement at the very top of his list!

Alternate Activity

If you have a large group of students, the above activity might prove too time consuming and you may wish to substitute this quicker way of getting into the lesson. Distribute student books and look at the list of twenty-four values on page 41. Give your students a few minutes to reflect on those values which are also very important to them, singling out three or four that have the most meaning or are the easiest to identify with. Then ask everyone to put their heads down and close their eyes as you repeat the list out loud, value for value. Ask your students to quietly raise their hands to indicate which of the values they share. In your own book, keep a running tally of hands raised for each value stated. When you've finished, share the results with the class, noting especially which values were shared by a significant number of their classmates. Then look together at the Search Institute survey results and call the group's attention to number 9 on the list: to have God at the center of my life. Proceed from there to introduce the next step.

Step 2

Bible Study: Psalms 42 and 43

For a change of pace today you might want to have your students (individually or in pairs) read and study Psalms 42 and 43 before you conduct your group study. Let your students choose partners and encourage pairs (or individuals) to find a quiet corner in your room (or outdoors if weather permits) for reading the psalms and discussing the questions. Ask everyone to read Psalms 42 and 43 aloud, slowly and quietly; then work through the questions, writing short answers in the spaces provided. Distribute a variety of colored pencils or markers and give everyone about ten minutes to work before calling the group back together to talk about what they've discovered. As they work, play the recording of Psalm 42 on the *Honest to God* cassette. Here are some guidelines for your group discussion:

1. What word picture does the psalmist use to describe his longing?

The psalmist compares his longing to that of a thirsty deer searching for water when there's none likely to be found.

2. What is the psalmist longing for in Psalms 42 and 43?

The psalmist longs for a closeness with God that he's not feeling at the moment.

3. Psalms 42 and 43 were probably written as a single psalm by someone in exile, far away from Israel and God's temple in Jerusalem. Find and underline sentences in both psalms which express the writer's sadness and longing to be back home where he can worship God with his own people in the temple.

In Psalm 42, verses 3 and 4, 6, 8, 9, and 10 all make reference to enemies, separation from the house of God, memories of the land of Jordan, oppression and suffering. Verses 1 and 2 of Psalm 43 make similar references. You'll want to point out in your discussion how the psalmist reminisces about the joy he experienced in being close to God through worship in the temple. He longs to experience that once again. (You might stimulate your students' thinking by asking them to imagine how Christians in communist countries feel today. Is it possible that Christians who are prohibited from worshipping God desire closeness with him more than those of us who experience complete freedom to worship?)

4. With a different color underline sentences showing that the psalmist still hopes and trusts in God.

Accept student answers here. The recurring refrain in verses 5 and 11 of Psalm 42 and verse 5 of Psalm 43 shows the psalm writer's hope in God. Another indication of the psalmist's awareness of God's presence and love is found in verse 8: "By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life."

5. With a third color circle the verse that is repeated three times in Psalms 42 and 43. What do these words say about the writer's relationship to God?

Psalm 42:5, 11; Psalm 43:5. These verses show that the psalmist remains close to God even though he is separated from the place he usually worships and communes with God. His relationship is still characterized by honesty with God, trust in God's faithfulness, and hope that God will eventually restore the writer to his homeland, where he will be free to worship with joy and great celebration.

6. (For personal reflection) The psalmist seems to say he feels closest to God when he worships with God's people in the temple. When do you feel closest to God? When do you feel far away from him?

Invite responses to this question, but don't press your students to answer against their wishes. Reflecting aloud on the ups and downs in your own relationship with God will help your young people see that, like the psalmist, you also encounter dry periods in your spiritual journey. This would be a good opportunity to emphasize the meaning of sanctification, a term your students will encounter elsewhere in the junior high curriculum. Explain that sanctification is the lifelong process by which Christians, through the work of the Holy Spirit, become gradually holy, slowly but surely closer to God and more like Jesus Christ. Make sure you stress the lifelong nature of sanctification and assure your young people that their desire to be closer to God is evidence of the Spirit already at work in their hearts. You might want to conclude by asking your students to suggest specific ways we can seek to become closer to God—through prayer, reading the Bible, and living lives that show we are God's children.

Step 3

Personal Responses

As a response to the theme of today's lesson—longing for closeness with God—we suggest you ask your students to write their own prayers to God. You might preface this step by reading to them Psalm 42 paraphrased by Leslie Brandt in his book *Psalms/Now*. As you read, ask your students to close their eyes and listen for the contrasting feelings the psalmist is expressing—on the one hand feelings of isolation and separation from God and on the other an assurance of God's abiding faithfulness and closeness.

As a desert wanderer longs for springs of cool water,
so my thirsty soul reaches out for You, O God.
How I long for a deeper sense of Your presence,
for a faith that will embrace You
without fear or doubt!
Yet while I weep in longing, people about me say,
"If God is not dead, where is He?"
I remember so well the faith of my childhood.
How real God was to me in those days
when I prayed and sang praises
and listened to His Word
in the fellowship of family and friends
Then why am I so depressed now?
Why cannot I recapture the joy and confidence
of those years?
I remember the stories of Your love
that I had been taught;
how merciful and all-powerful were Your dealings
with Your children throughout history!
Yet now my heart is empty,
and waves of doubt flood over my soul.
I pray, but the heavens, too, are empty.
It is almost as if God had forgotten all about me.
And while I struggle with the sickness of doubt,
people about me say,
"If God is not dead, where is He?"
O foolish heart, why do you seethe in unrest?
God has not changed;
His love for me is ever the same.
I must renew my faith in God;

I must again shout His praises
even when I don't feel His presence.
For truly He is God,
and He is my Help and my Hope.

Follow your reading by asking your students to write their own prayers to God on page 45 of their books. Encourage them to be specific and honest, telling God how close or far they feel from him—and asking him for his presence with them. Provide time for thinking and writing (and by all means join the group by writing your own prayer for closeness with your God).

Step 4

Closing

You might want to use your closing minutes to review the memory work from last week (Psalm 51:1-2) and to introduce today's verses (10-12). Distribute take-home sheets and point out that the psalms listed for home reading continue the theme of today's lesson: longing for closeness with God. Then ask your students to prepare for prayer as you play "Oh, For a Closer Walk," on the *Honest to God* cassette. (Your students might be interested to know that William Cowper, the song's composer, suffered from severe depression for much of his life and even attempted suicide once. He was extremely shy and withdrawn, but after becoming a Christian he wrote many simple and gentle hymns like the prayer-song "Oh, For a Closer Walk.") After listening to the song, ask your students to silently offer the prayers they've written in their books.

GIVE ME A BREAK!

8

Memory Work

¹How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD Almighty!

²My soul yearns, even faints,
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh cry out
for the living God.

Psalm 84:1-2

Scripture

Psalm 73

Lesson Truth

Although appearances may deceive us into thinking God is unfair, God will punish the wicked and reward the righteous.

Lesson Aims

General:

Students will see that the present appearance of the wicked prospering and the righteous suffering is deceptive and covers the truth that God deals justly with all people.

Specific:

Students will be able to

- A. suggest examples of God's seeming unfairness in the world today and describe their own feelings about it.
- B. contrast the psalmist's statement of complaint against God with his eventual statement of renewed trust.
- C. identify the psalmist's confession of ignorance and a bad attitude as the source of his envy.
- D. describe the effects of envy on a person's faith.

Lesson Background

If the last lesson dealt with a very "spiritual" feeling—longing to be with God—this lesson may be said to deal with a most "human" feeling—envy. The writer of Psalm 73 ". . . envied . . . the prosperity of the wicked" (v. 3). He saw that in his land and in his age rich people, evil and arrogant, were also healthy and prosperous while he, along with the rest of the innocent and good people, were poor, abused, and victimized.

The psalmist's feelings may be difficult for your students to grasp. They are taught not to envy but to emulate the rich. Our society, in a thousand subtle and blatant ways, sets before us an attainable ideal of success, wealth, and happiness. You owe it to yourself, the ads say, to own a luxury car and live in a fine home. The rags-to-riches theme permeates our literature. Even some religious leaders proclaim that faith can help you be successful or, as it has been put more crudely, "get fat with faith."

The psalmist has a very different life experience and view. In his time it was virtually impossible to become rich through hard work. The wealthy were a separate class.

I remember as a boy in pre-revolutionary China seeing the difference between the wealthy merchants and landowners and the peasants. Fat, arrogant, indifferent to peasant suffering, the rich were like a separate race. That's still true in many of the poorer Third World countries. Wealth is equated with oppression, for people became wealthy by exploiting the poor; and arrogance, for the rich consider themselves far above the peasants; and health, for the rich and their children are well fed while others are hungry, weak, and diseased. Read the psalmist's devastating description of the wicked in verses 3 to 12 and you will begin to see what rich people were truly like in those days.

Underlying this psalm is the biblical understanding that faith does not bring worldly success. The ones Jesus called blessed (Matt. 5) were not the arrogant rich but the humble poor. This psalm points precisely to the trap of prosperity. Wealth itself is not wicked, but it does tend to bring with it certain sins: pride (v. 6), conceit (v. 7), arrogance and oppression (v. 8), and the silly idea that God doesn't know what the wealthy are up to (v. 11). As the wealthiest people in the present world, we North Americans should be wary that we don't develop such characteristics.

The psalmist recognized the inequalities that existed in his world. That was perceptive, not wrong. But he went on to make two mistakes: he thought God was unfair, and he wished himself to be one of these rich, wicked people. Anger at God and envy of the rich almost led him into denying his faith (v. 2) and betraying God's people (v. 15).

Drawing back from that slippery slope, the psalmist went to worship before God. In that time of reassessment, of realigning priorities, he regained a vision of God's purposes in the world. He saw again that the Lord truly rules all lives, and that the wicked live blindly in a dream world. When God comes in righteous judgment, these people will be utterly ruined.

He also saw that God's goodness to "the pure in heart" is the hope of the innocent. The Lord will care for them. They may not profit in standard human terms. But even in this life they are far richer than the rich, and in the future life they have a sure hope in their God (vv. 25-26).

This poem is a movie rather than a snapshot. It portrays the writer's dawning realization that his thinking and feeling have led him astray and that his envy almost destroyed him. It maps his progress from black jealousy to buoyant joy. We see his soul's pilgrimage to a better faith and trust.

Two themes should be clearly distinguished as you teach this lesson: outrage at injustice (developed more fully in lesson 10) and envy of others.

There are glaring inequities in our world, just as there were in the psalmist's. Some throw away food while others starve; some are homeless while others complain about how much it costs to heat or cool a house with two or three rooms per person; some shiver in rags while others flounce in furs; some worry over food bills, tuition, and debts while others indulge themselves in the fastest cars, the biggest boats, and the fanciest restaurants. When we see such inequities, especially close at hand, we should be outraged. Such glaring differences are not right or fair.

That anger should be directed not at God but at our systems that promote such inequities and at those among us who ruthlessly exploit others. Our human evil has corrupted God's good earth and brought suffering into the world. Fueled by unselfish anger, our task is to correct such inequities, right such wrongs, and bring greater justice in our world.

Envy is different. It springs from coveting the good someone else possesses and from wanting it for ourselves. Envy is always selfish, grasping, and jealous.

Try to be realistic about what young people envy. As the lesson suggests, most adolescents do not yearn for the life of the famous stars of sports, movies, and music or desire the power, prestige, and privilege that many adults seek. Typically young people envy the popular kids, the pretty and handsome ones, the sports stars in their own schools.

Help your students recognize their own coveting and envy. Then help them bring those feelings before God. This psalm shows the value of telling God what we feel, openly and honestly. The psalmist did that and came to a new appreciation of God's goodness to him and the realization he had no real cause to envy others. Your students can gain the same valuable insight by bringing their coveting and envy before the face of God.

Materials

Teacher

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Bible
3. *Honest to God* cassette
4. Tape player
5. Song (optional), see back of manual

Students

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Pens or pencils
3. RSV or NIV Bibles

Lesson at a Glance

- Step 1: Students listen to taped news items and discuss them and other examples of inequities they have heard of (10 minutes).
- Step 2: Students study and discuss Psalm 73 (20-25 minutes).
- Step 3: Students respond to the lesson in one of the suggested ways (15 minutes).
- Step 4: Students receive assignments for the coming week and close with prayer (5 minutes).

Introduction

Today's psalm study is tailor-made for young teenagers; in fact, the psalmist himself exhibits one of the predominant characteristics of seventh and eighth graders, a certain preoccupation with inconsistency and unfairness. By this point in the year, you've become fairly well-acquainted with the young people in your group. Are they beginning to question things they've been taught? Do they sometimes seem troubled by apparent incompatibility between what they hear at home and church and what they see demonstrated in the world around them? Are they bothered by the slightest hint or appearance of unfairness toward themselves or others? If so, you've probably got a class full of normal kids!

Junior high students often find themselves searching for answers to questions that puzzle them and force them to rethink their beliefs. That's not easy for anyone, let alone young people who are just beginning to think abstractly. These lessons (and today's in particular) are aimed at helping you help them through this difficult process. Encourage their questions in a warm and personal way, while making it clear that you may not have ready answers to all of them. Knowing that you will listen without putting down their queries as heretical or, perhaps worse, inconsequential, is important to young people. Even more significant will be your example of a committed Christian who continues to struggle with faith questions as the psalmist does in Psalm 73.

Step 1

Introducing the Lesson

Begin today's lesson by playing the taped news items which suggest the theme of today's lesson. (See cassette that accompanies this quarter.) Simply ask the class to listen to each of the anecdotes and then to suggest ways in which they are similar. Invite responses from the group. What reactions or emotions did each illustration evoke? You might ask the group to suggest captions or headlines that would accompany such stories in a daily newspaper or a weekly news magazine. If time permits, you might also want to elicit from your students other examples of inequities they've heard or read about recently. Conclude your conversation by asking your students if sometimes, deep down inside themselves, they ask questions about God's fairness. What does it mean when we see things happen around us that suggest God isn't being fair?

Alternate Activity

To begin on a slightly different, perhaps more personal note, you might ask your students to think about the concept of envy. What sorts of people do they envy? (Try to avoid naming names.) People with good looks? Athletic ability? Intelligence? Beautiful clothes? Lots of friends and admirers? People who appear to have all of the above—and more to spare? Spend a few minutes talking about how it feels to be envious of someone else. What motivates envy in us? Is it a good emotion? Why or why not?

Step 2

Psalm Study: Psalm 73

Distribute student books and ask everyone to turn to page 47. Choose a volunteer to read the story about Tom and Ann (or read it to the group yourself). Spend a few minutes talking about Ann's feelings. What about the questions she asks God? Is it wrong to question God's fairness? Is it something only weak or immature Christians do? Encourage your students to do some wondering out loud; leave the questions unresolved as you inform the group that the book of Psalms contains questions very much like Ann's. Psalm writers throughout the book ask frank, soul-searching questions of God without hesitating or fearing that he'll reject them. Psalm 73 is a good example.

Read through the psalm on page 48 together. You might want to read the first three verses yourself, asking the group to join you in reading verses 8-12 in unison. Then read from verse 13 to the end of the psalm yourself. (Be sure to practice reading the psalm aloud a few times before class so that you can express the psalmist's thoughts with appropriate emotion and accurate interpretation.)

Follow up your reading by providing time for answering the Discuss/Decide questions on page 49. Either do this as a group or divide up into smaller groups and allow time for study. (Be sure to provide each small group with an NIV or RSV Bible for their study.) In either case, include some of the following in your discussion of the answers to each question:

1. Verses 2 and 3 describe the psalmist's problem. Underline those phrases that show how the psalmist's envy was affecting him. What was it doing to his faith?

"My feet were on the point of stumbling . . . I should have slipped." These phrases suggest that the writer's bitterness and envy had almost destroyed his faith. He was being consumed by his sense of God's unfairness to the point of nearly rejecting God. Take time to point out to your students the results of persistent envy of others who seem to be thriving while we struggle. Envy eats away at us, turning our attention to ourselves rather than to God.

2. Read verses 4-12 again. In which ways do the wicked seem to have everything? (Use an NIV or RSV Bible in addition to the text from the Jerusalem Bible used in this lesson.) Do you think the psalmist was seeing an accurate picture of the wicked?

The psalm writer cites their lack of struggles, their healthy bodies, their freedom from suffering and burdens and human ills, their apparent control over the earth and people, their seeming carefree attitude and increasing wealth. His picture of the wicked is probably distorted by preoccupation with his personal shortcomings and material inadequacies. It's also clear that the writer is thinking only of physical blessings and short-term satisfaction with the trappings of this life—he has forgotten about the deeper sense of joy and peace that comes from living in God's love. (Again point out the consuming and distorting nature of envy. Invite some modern-day examples—instances which may lead one to conclude that a person is flourishing while flouting God and his holiness.)

3. Read verses 13-17 in another version (RSV or NIV). What specific act helped the psalmist to understand the truth?

Verse 17 suggests that only after the psalmist entered the house of God to worship did he come to his senses and see that the wicked would be punished, that God would see justice done.

4. What is the "end in store" for the wicked? For the righteous?

Verses 18-28 describe the psalmist's awareness that the wicked will perish and the righteous will live with God forever.

5. How does the psalmist feel about his own bitterness and envy? What words does he use to describe himself? (Refer to more than one version.)

In verses 21 and 22 the psalmist remarks on his own bitterness and stupidity. He expresses sorrow for his reactions which he now considers senseless and ignorant. He realizes that his preoccupation resulted from his own selfishness and shortsighted perspective on God's love and faithfulness.

6. In the closing verses of Psalm 73, how does the psalmist describe his relationship to God? (Underline words and phrases that tell what God is doing and will do for the the psalmist.)

The psalm writer says God is holding his right hand, guiding him with advice, and will receive him into glory in the end. God becomes his only answer and delight. He takes shelter in God, enjoys being close to him. The psalmist concludes with a promise to tell about all God has done.

7. If you could interview the psalmist today, what advice might he give about how to handle feelings of envy or anger at the apparent unfairness we see in the world?

Accept students' answers here, adding some insights of your own to help your students understand that they may bring their feelings of bitterness or envy to God with honesty and forthrightness, as the psalmist does in Psalm 73. Encourage them also to look to God for answers, as the psalmist does. Only remembering that God is just and good and faithful to his people can help us escape the destructiveness of a bitter and envious heart. Reminding ourselves, as the psalmist did, of God's enduring love and renewing our commitment to live in his strength will help our attitudes to change too.

Note: You should also take time to point out to your students that all those who prosper are not necessarily wicked! And, it wouldn't hurt to remind them that they, too, may well be the objects of the envy of younger children or classmates with fewer talents or possessions.

Step 3

Personal Responses

You might want to give your students some options for responding to today's lesson. Here are some possibilities:

1. Turn to page 50 and look at the statements and pictures there. Ask your students to select one and respond to it in writing, taking the part and perspective of the person being addressed. Ask them to concentrate on giving a loving and helpful answer to the person who is asking the question about envy or anger at the apparent unfairness they're experiencing. (Use page 51 for writing responses.)
2. To students who prefer drawing to writing, you might give the option of cartooning. Using ideas suggested by the questions on page 50, examples given (from the tape or students' suggestions) in step 1, or something they've experienced in their own lives, students should draw a cartoon depicting the frustration a Christian might feel at seeing a fellow believer suffer while an unbeliever flourishes and thrives. Ask students to caption their completed cartoons with a sentence that summarizes something they've learned today.
3. If last week's personal response, writing prayers, was especially meaningful to your students, you might try it again. Ask them to think about some feelings today's psalm study touched off inside of them and to express those feelings honestly to God. (Writing a letter to God is another possibility.)
4. If your students respond well to sentence starters, try these:

The three things I envy most are . . .
The best way to describe my envy is . . .
I can really resolve my envy in just one way: . . .

Step 4

Closing

Make sure your students have their take-home sheets and encourage them to memorize Psalm 84:1-2. (You might want to tell everyone that next week's psalm study will take a closer look at Psalm 84.) Call the group's attention to the readings for the week also, pointing out that they include other instances in which the writers seem to envy the status of the wicked.

Close your session by asking your students to join you in prayer, saying in unison the words of Psalm 73:23-28. Together you will be committing yourselves to trusting in God and putting behind you the attraction of worldliness.

HAPPINESS IS . . .

9

Memory Work

Students should add verses 3 and 4 (in dark type) to previous memory work:

¹How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD Almighty!

²My soul yearns, even faints,
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh cry out
for the living God.

³Even the sparrow has found a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may have her young—
a place near your altar,

O LORD Almighty, my King and my God.

⁴Blessed are those who dwell in your house;
they are ever praising you.

Psalm 84:1-4

Scripture

Psalm 84 and Psalm 100

Lesson Truth

True joy on earth for the psalmist is found in being near to God and in bringing praise to him.

Lesson Aims

General:

Students will realize that joys and pleasures in this life are God's gift to us, but the most lasting joy we can experience comes from worshiping and praising him.

Specific:

Students will be able to

- A. identify several things that bring them happiness or joy.
- B. identify the psalmist's greatest joy in life.
- C. compare the psalmist's joy in worship with their own feelings about worship.
- D. write short devotionals expressing their praise to the Lord.

Lesson Background

This lesson may not be the easiest to teach. We usually find it simpler to talk about dark emotions (like fear, envy, and guilt) than about bright ones (like peace, praise, and joy). Perhaps that's because we are so accustomed to talking about ourselves; and the bright emotions come when we forget ourselves and focus our attention on our Lord and his goodness. Still it's important that you give your students a taste of the joy of worshiping God as that is reflected in the psalms.

Help your students feel something of the experience of these psalmists, the feeling underlying their songs. One of them writes of yearning to be in "the courts of the Lord" (84:2), of finding a home near God's altar (v. 3), and of the pilgrimage to Zion (vv. 5-6). The other writes of coming before the Lord "with joyful song" (100:2) and of entering "his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise" (v. 4). Clearly these are powerful worship experiences.

After reading such lines, your students will naturally compare their own Sunday worship experiences with what the psalmists describe. That in turn will likely raise questions as to why they don't feel the same yearning, the same sense of blessedness, the same consciousness of God's favor poured out, the same gladness and thanksgiving that these ancient poets felt.

Perhaps the answer you must give is because they lack the required spiritual depth. Our worship should, of course, breathe the same sense of joy as these psalms. But you should also mention that the psalmists are not talking about a regular weekly gathering (like our Sunday worship) but about festivals (like our Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Easter celebrations).

Three times a year Israel's faithful were called to gather at Mount Zion, the dwelling place of God. They would prepare for the trip, band with friends for the pilgrimage, travel for days or even weeks, singing and chanting psalms on the way. With rising excitement they would approach Jerusalem, join the throngs gathering at the temple, and be lifted up by the magnificent spectacle of the temple worship.

We have no festivals that quite match these. Closest, perhaps, is our passion week culminating in the triumphant Easter celebration.

Psalm 84 was probably composed for the pilgrimage to the Feast of the Tabernacles. This feast carried the special admonition, "Be joyful at your Feast—you, your sons and daughters . . ." (Deut. 16:14). Marching under the Lord's protection (84:11), the people gathered to praise God for his blessings. This was truly a time of joy.

Psalm 100 was likely a liturgical hymn sung antiphonally by the priestly choir and the pilgrims as they entered the outer court of the temple. It called them to praise, urged them to enter and bring their thank offerings, and invited them to praise the Lord for his enduring and faithful goodness.

Studying these psalms is intended to help your students understand better the nature of true joy and how such joy may be found in worship.

Young people in our modern world encounter various concepts of happiness and ideas of what brings such happiness. Ads tell them happiness is having an important job and driving home in a Cadillac at the end of the workday, smoking a cigarette and drinking a beer on the top of a splendid mountain peak, or sailing through the ocean waves with other "beautiful people." Soaps tell them happiness is having a busy love life. Cartoons say "happiness is a warm puppy." Friends say it's being free of parental rules, free to do their own thing. Counselors say it's having high self-esteem. Coaches say it's helping the team win a big match. Now you tell them happiness is being near to God and praising him.

Clearly you're not talking about the same thing as the ads, soaps, and friends. You're talking not about a momentary flash of pleasure but about a lasting joy, not about a prideful sense of self-satisfaction but about a peaceful forgetting about self, not about a nice feeling of being admired by others, but about the deep goodness of praising God. You're talking about an entirely new kind and much higher level of happiness.

C. S. Lewis's autobiography is called *Surprised by Joy*. Having caught a glimmer of the delight of being near God, Lewis could never turn away from that glimpse of joy. He described his life as a reluctant, twisting, but steady pilgrimage toward worshipping the God who alone can give true joy.

If you can give your students a glimpse of that surprising joy and set their feet on the path toward it, you will have given them the most blessed gift.

Materials**Teacher**

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Bible
3. *Honest to God* cassette
4. Tape player
5. Song, (optional), see back of manual

Students

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Bibles
3. Pens or pencils

**Lesson
at a Glance**

Step 1: Students listen to taped responses of people discussing what makes them happy, then reflect on what causes their own happiness (10 minutes).
Step 2: Students read and discuss Psalms 84 and 100 (20 minutes).
Step 3: Students write short praise devotionals to be copied and distributed to the class (20 minutes).
Step 4: Students close with singing or reading of Psalm 100, ending with prayer (5 minutes).

Introduction

This week's lesson offers an upbeat contrast to last week's discussion about envy. You'll get to know the kids in your group a bit better today by talking with them about things that bring them true joy and happiness. Use the lesson to point them beyond a search for meaning and happiness in possessions and events that tantalize and bring them pleasure now. While accepting your students' statements about themselves and their personal happiness as sincere and valid, do try to expand their awareness of what true joy can be by placing it within the context of the Psalms. Through the eyes of the psalmist, help them realize that growing closer to God will bring eternal joy, a deep-down sense of contentment and peace.

It may be difficult for your students to identify with the psalmist's burning desire to worship with God's people in his temple. Attending church and participating in congregational worship may not rank near the top of your students' "Happiness is . . ." list at all. You may want to use this opportunity to explore with your group some ways in which worship could be more joyful, more meaningful for them. And by all means emphasize the real message the psalmist brings us in today's lesson: Happiness is belonging to God and giving him praise in all we do—wherever we are!

Step 1**Introducing the Lesson**

Begin today's session by asking your students to listen to the section of the tape that contains the spontaneous reactions of a variety of people to the question "What makes you feel really happy?" Then ask your students to mention similarities and differences they noted in the comments. Were there obvious differences between girls and boys, young people and older people? Which comments struck a familiar chord with your students? With you? Which were especially "far out" or difficult to identify with?

Distribute student books and pencils and ask everyone to turn to page 53. After reading the brief introductory sentences together, give your students an opportunity to reflect and write about times, people, and places they associate with their own happiness. (Be sure to join them in doing the exercise yourself.) Conclude the writing activity by asking for volunteers to share their responses

with the group. (If your time is limited, invite just one or two responses to each sentence starter.) As you talk about what makes us happy, be sure to emphasize that the ability to feel joy, as well as the people and places and good times that make us happy, are gifts from God to us, his people. Then conclude your conversation about personal happiness by remarking that many psalm writers dealt with the theme of joy and happiness in their writing. Tell your group that today's psalms, 84 and 100, present the psalmists' interesting completions to the "Happiness is . . ." sentence starter.

Step 2

Bible Study: Psalms 84 and 100

Before turning to pages 54 and 55 to read today's psalms for study, read the following interpretation of Psalm 84 (from *Psalms/Now* by Leslie Brandt) to your students. Ask them to close their eyes and listen for the source of the psalm writer's happiness. What, more than all else, gives the psalmist true joy?

O God, the center of Your will
is truly the place of fulfillment.
I long incessantly—for the peace and security
of walking with You.
Therein only is purpose and meaning for my life.
Even the birds of the air
and the animals that inhabit our forests
abide within Your orbit and destiny for them.
Thus it is that the man
who discovers and follows Your course for him
is forever blessed.
How enriched they are
who draw their power from You,
whose hearts are focused on You!
Even as they wend their way
through this fractured world,
they become springs of healing,
reservoirs of power,
to the sick, weak, and empty lives
they touch about them.
O Lord, look with loving mercy upon those
who have yielded their destinies to You.
Just one day in the center of Your will
is incomparably better than a thousand
spent in the pursuit
of self-centered aims and objectives.
It is more fulfilling to be an underpaid clerk
in the service of my God
than to be owner and director
of some huge and wealthy enterprise.
O God, nothing that is
truly good and worthwhile
is withheld from those who walk
within Your will.
The man who trusts in You is very rich indeed.

Then ask your students to read both psalms and answer the discussion questions about them on page 56. (You might want to offer the option of working in pairs or small groups.) As your students get to work, make yourself available for answering questions and guiding their study. When the group has finished working, get back together to discuss their answers. Use the following comments as a guideline for your discussion.

1. Read Psalm 84 carefully. Then put yourself in the place of the psalm writer and complete these sentences:

- a. The happiest times in my life are when . . .**
- b. The place I usually feel the happiest is . . .**
- c. I feel especially happy when I'm with these people: . . .**
- d. I get a deep-down feeling of joy when . . .**

Accept students' answers, making sure to emphasize that the psalm writer's joy comes from worshiping God in his temple along with other believers. You might want to add that Psalm 84 is classified as a liturgical psalm, one used by God's people as they gathered for worship. Liturgical psalms paint a picture of worshipers making a pilgrimage or journey to the city of Jerusalem to worship in God's temple there. As they traveled, the people sang for joy in anticipation of being in God's presence in the temple. For the Jews of the Old Testament, Jerusalem and the temple were the absolute center of life! (You might also want to remind your students that for most Israelites, such a pilgrimage was at the most a yearly event. No wonder they expressed such longing for the temple and an opportunity to worship there!)

2. The psalmist is describing a pilgrimage to God's temple in Jerusalem. What difficulty do the travelers face along the way? (verses 4-7)

Verse 6 mentions passing through the Valley of Baca, which some biblical scholars believe to be an especially dry stretch of land through which pilgrims had to pass on their way to the temple in Jerusalem. The psalmist seems to suggest that God's watchful care and the worshipers' joyful expectation make that difficult place a place of refreshment.

3. In Psalm 84:10, the psalmist says he would rather spend "one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere." Why do you think the psalmist makes such a dramatic statement? Do believers today feel that same need to worship in God's house?

You'll want to point out that the Jews of the Old Testament believed that God resided in the temple and that to be truly present with him they had to be there bringing praise to him in person. Nothing felt quite so wonderful and satisfied the psalmist so much as being there in immediate communion with his Lord. Although Christians today believe they can commune with God at any time and in many places, that inner desire to bring worship and praise to him in the company of other believers remains strong. Congregational worship offers that opportunity.

Take time, if you have it, to explore the connection between worship and joy with your students. Invite their reactions to the psalmist's enthusiasm for worship; then invite their ideas about worship and its potential for joy. What parts of worship do they find particularly happy and satisfying? What parts seem lacking in joy? When, during the worship service, do they feel especially close to God? What, in their opinion, could be done to make congregational worship a more joyful experience for children and young people? (As you talk about finding joy in worship, you'll want to remind your young people that the psalm writer was writing out of a mature faith—his joy is natural and spontaneous. Assure your students that as their faith matures and they grow closer to God, they, too, will find a greater, deeper joy in worshiping and praising him.)

4. Read Psalm 100 carefully. What reasons does the writer give for calling the people to praise in the temple?

In verses 3-5 the psalmist suggests that coming to worship the Lord will enable the worshipers to "know" God, to understand that they were made by him and belong to him, to realize his goodness, and to recognize his enduring love and faithfulness.

5. In Psalm 100:3, what does the word picture "sheep of his pasture" suggest about the relationship of God to his people? In which other psalm you've studied do you find the same comparison?

The comparison (used also in Psalm 23) suggests that God cares intimately for his people as a shepherd cares for his sheep.

6. After reading these two psalms, how would you define true joy?

Accept students' answers here, adding to their comments if necessary to include elements of anticipation, peace, thankfulness, exuberance, and unrestrained praise in your final definition of a believer's ultimate joy.

Step 3

Personal Responses

As a response to today's lesson, invite your students to write a short praise devotional of their own which you can compile into a series to distribute to the whole class. Ask everyone to look at page 57 for an example of a format to follow and encourage them to use the book of Psalms as a starting place. You might suggest that they begin by scanning the Psalms for a verse or short passage that speaks to them about something they've learned during this quarter of lessons on the Psalms. After selecting a passage, they should summarize in a few sentences what it says or means to them. Follow the meditation with one question the reader should answer, preferably a personal question. Conclude the devotional by writing a short (one sentence) prayer.

Distribute Bibles and provide time and quiet for working. (You might want to offer the option of working outdoors or in the church sanctuary for greater solitude and a better atmosphere for worship.) Remind the students that this exercise has a dual purpose: it's intended for their personal worship, but it will also eventually contribute to the devotional life of their classmates. When your students have completed their work, collect their books with a promise to duplicate the entire set of devotionals so that everyone can use them.

Step 4

Closing

To close your session you might want to sing or listen to the recorded versification of Psalm 100, "All People That on Earth Do Dwell." (See back of manual and cassette that accompanies this quarter.) Or consider doing an antiphonal reading of Psalm 100. Simply divide your class into two groups and ask the groups to stand facing each other. Group 1 should read verses 1 and 3, with group 2 taking verses 2 and 4 to create a back-and-forth effect. Ask everyone to read the concluding verse together with joy and enthusiasm. End your session by joining hands around the circle and offering your praise to God in prayer before you leave. Ask him, too, to fill each of you with the joy and happiness that come from belonging to him.

MAKES ME MAD!

10

Memory Work

¹I will exalt you, my God the King;
I will praise your name for ever and ever.
Every day I will praise you
and extol your name for ever and ever.
Psalm 145:1-2

Scripture

Psalm 7 and Psalm 137

Lesson Truth

When the psalmist asks God to judge, he expects God to bring justice and relief to those who are oppressed.

Lesson Aims

General:

Students will realize that anger against injustice is biblical and that praying to God to rectify wrongs is right.

Specific:

Students will be able to

- A. compare selfish anger with anger over injustice to people.
- B. identify the reasons for the psalmist's anger and his request for God's judgment.
- C. describe the emotional effects of anger on those who are experiencing injustice.
- D. ask God's intervention in specific situations of injustice or unfairness in the world today.

Lesson Background

In our society there are differing ideas about anger. Temper tantrums of frustrated children and immature adults are usually dismissed as the actions of those who have not (yet) learned emotional control. But other kinds of anger, springing from the stress and pains of life, are given greater validity. Some say it's healthier to quickly vent such feelings; others recommend a "cooling off" period as advantageous both for angry individuals and the targets of those intense feelings.

In the Christian community one can find similarly differing views. The Bible itself seems almost divided regarding this emotion. On the one hand are the warnings against anger (Ps. 37:8; Prov. 27:4, 30:33; Matt. 5:22; Rom. 12:19; Eph. 4:31; 1 Thess. 5:9); on the other hand, we find frequent references to God's anger or wrath (Ex. 32:10; Deut. 1:34; Josh. 7:26). Many psalms speak in angry tones (Ps. 109, 69) or ask God to kill the wicked (Ps. 143:12, 139:19). Other passages tell us in being angry not to sin, clearly implying that righteous anger is possible (Ps. 4:4; Eph. 4:26).

How are we to understand this emotion we call anger, wrath, or outrage? Is it always wrong? Is it ever right? When might it be right?

A careful reading of Scripture shows that anger can be a "good" emotion, but only under rigorous conditions and strict limitations. Even at best, it carries inherent dangers of becoming a "bad" feeling.

C. S. Lewis spoke in several of his writings of anger as the natural and God-ordained emotional response to evil and injustice. The Jews cursed more bitterly than the surrounding (pagan) peoples because, says Lewis, "they took right and wrong more seriously" (*Reflections on the Psalms*, p. 30). Those who truly believe and revere a righteous God are correspondingly more indignant about the unrighteous acts or unjust conditions that God hates. How could anyone who believes in a Father who loves his created children, a God who so loved the world that he sent his only Son to save those who would believe, not become angry at seeing starving children, at reading of drug dealers who encourage human bondage for their own profit, at witnessing the ruthless ravages of war? Anger at evil is so right and proper that there is something wrong with those who do not feel it.

Sadly, we become angrier at personal affronts than at the sufferings of others. Evil (perceived) against ourselves or our families awakens a hundred times the indignation that evil against a stranger does. The injustice of an undeserved bad grade makes us burn far more than do the injustices of racial and economic abuse.

Like all emotions, anger is transient. All feelings come and go: love, hate, enthusiasm, disappointment, guilt, relief. When we try to make any feeling last, we tend to distort it. That's also true with anger. To harbor it, to nurse it, to foster it, is to change it to something wrong. So the psalmist tells us to let our anger dissipate with the coming of night (Ps. 4:4).

From these perspectives on anger, you can begin to understand the feelings of the writers of the two psalms you will be studying in this lesson.

Psalms 7 and 137 move from an appeal for divine help (vv. 1-2), to a reason why that help is requested (v. 5, enemies pursue), to a testimony of trust in God (vv. 10-11), to a description of how God will punish the evildoer (vv. 12-16), to a promise to continue praising God (v. 17).

Key to understanding this psalm is to grasp what the writer means when he calls on God as judge (v. 8). Among the Israelites a judge was not an impartial upholder of the law who weighed the criminal charges brought by a prosecutor against the defense offered by the accused. A judge was rather the last appeal of a mistreated person in a civil case. Ideally, a judge was considered the champion of the underdog, the defender of the defenseless, the rescuer of the victims. A judge was one "who saves the upright in heart" (v. 10). It is in this sense that the psalmist calls on God to be his shield and defender, to punish the evil ones, and to turn the violence of the wicked on their own heads. Speaking from a position of utter helplessness, the psalmist pleads with the righteous Judge to loose his anger against the poet's wicked enemies.

Psalms 7 and 137 come out of the Babylonian exile. With bitter memories of those days, the returned prisoner recalls vividly his mocking captors and the suffering they caused. It is their sacrilege rather than his own remembered pain that causes him to call down curses on these oppressors. Even their babies are to be smashed against the stones.

Your students will undoubtedly find the language of this psalm shocking and repulsive. They may ask you how it could possibly be included in God's Word.

Don't put yourself in the position of trying to defend what the psalmist says here. Instead point out how much better it is to express such feelings (if genuine and heartfelt) to God than to act on them in a vengeful way. The writer evidently did not himself do what he asked God to do—treat the oppressors' children as his

own had been treated. Rather he turns to God with honest anger, cries out in his bitterness, but leaves it to God to judge whether this awful punishment should come on the wicked or not.

The psalmist's cry of anger is more honest, more open, and more correct than the mean words we may have spoken to get back at someone for a small slight. At least this ancient believer spoke openly to God of his feelings. How much better that is than our own tendency to hide our feelings and take personal vengeance. Open anger is better than hidden hatred. To bring our feelings before God is the first step toward correcting what may be wrong about them.

Materials**Teacher**

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Bible
3. *Honest to God* cassette
4. Tape player
5. Song (optional), see back of manual

Students

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Pens or pencils
3. "Test" papers (one per student)

**Lesson
at a Glance**

- Step 1: Students are provoked to anger, then discuss what it's like to feel angry and helpless (10 minutes).
- Step 2: Students read and discuss Psalms 7 and 137 (20 minutes).
- Step 3: Students make written responses to the lesson theme using one of the suggested methods (15 minutes).
- Step 4: Students close with prayer, then listen to musical version of Psalm 137 on tape (5-10 minutes).

Introduction

Wayne Rice, in his book *Junior High Ministry*, writes about the emotional intensity of early adolescents. Speaking specifically about anger, the subject of today's lesson, he says:

The junior higher's emotions can be explosive as well as deep. At times their discontent with themselves and others will express itself in anger, rebellion, or fear. And with junior highers, the anger and rebellion is likely to be physical rather than the verbal expression manifested by older adolescents. If something happens that the junior higher doesn't like—a person may bump into them or call them a derogatory name—they may lash out and throw a punch. Junior high and middle schools deal with considerable fighting between students, with the girls often being just as violent as the boys. Anger against adults often expresses itself in outbursts that end in tears. This anger is not focused as it is in high school students, who can express what they don't like in logical statements. The anger of the junior higher is highly emotional and usually short-lived. It is also quite difficult to deal with.

Perhaps you, too, in the course of teaching this quarter, have discovered anger not far beneath the surface of your students' church school selves. Today's lesson offers an opportunity to discuss the subject within the context of the Psalms. Help your students see that anger is not an uncommon expression of emotion in the Bible. God's people even prayed their anger to him! We hope this lesson will enable your young people to examine their own emotions, to differentiate between selfish anger and just anger, and to express some of their own anger to God honestly.

Step 1

Introducing the Lesson

You might want to begin your time together by using one of the brief devotionals written by your students last week. Then, if you've duplicated the devotionals for distribution, give them out at this time and encourage your students to use them at home for their personal devotions or around the table with their families. You might also share some of your reactions to their work, especially if you were particularly touched by their expressions of praise or trust. Knowing their work enabled you to worship would be encouraging to your students.

Then, to introduce the concept of anger, we suggest you stir up a bit of it among your group. Distribute sheets of notebook paper and pens or pencils to your students and explain that you will be spending the hour testing them on all they've learned this quarter, including the memory work. You might want to write the references on your board (Ps. 23; 8:1-5; 51:1-2, 10-12; 84:1-4) and tell your students to begin by writing out these verses from memory. Explain that the second section of the test will involve answering questions about each of the psalms you've studied so far. You might also add that you'll be grading the tests this week and mailing them home with your comments to their parents. Then wait for reactions—they'll surely come!

As soon as your students begin expressing their anger at you, assure them that you do not really intend to spend the hour testing them; rather, explain that you'd like to talk about anger today. Then explore their angry reactions to your unannounced test. How did they feel about your intention to test them without giving them an opportunity to prepare? Why did they feel so angry? What could they do about it if you had actually gone ahead with your plan? How does it feel to be angry and helpless? What is the best way to handle anger—vent it with words and actions or keep it simmering inside, hoping it will subside? Conclude your conversation by telling your students that the psalm writers often felt angry and helpless—and they told God about it. In fact, the book of Psalms contains more "psalms of lament" than any other kind of psalm! (Psalms of lament are those in which an individual or a group of people express their despair, anger, and feelings of helplessness to God.)

Alternate Activity

If you would prefer not to provoke an actual response of anger in your students, you could alter the above activity by turning it into a "What if . . ." proposition for discussion. Rather than passing out paper and pencils and announcing the test, simply ask your students how they might have felt if you had decided to give them an extensive unannounced test today on the Psalms and the memory work. Invite them to describe how they might have reacted and why. Then go on to talk about the feelings of anger and helplessness in an unfair situation.

Step 2

Bible Study: Psalm 7 and Psalm 137

Distribute student books and give everyone a few minutes to read the introduction to lesson 10 on pages 58 and 59. Then turn to Psalms 7 and 137 on the following pages and ask for volunteers to read both passages aloud for the group. (You may want to explain that Psalm 7 is a psalm of lament written from the perspective of an individual believer calling out or complaining to God, while Psalm 137 is written from the perspective of a whole community of angry people crying to God for relief from oppression.) Then together work through the discussion questions about both psalms, using the following notes to guide your discussion.

1. What is the psalmist's problem in Psalm 7? What (or who) is oppressing him?

The psalmist is feeling unjustly overcome by his enemies. See verses 1 and 2 (references to his pursuers who are about to tear him up and rip him to pieces), verses 5 and 6 (references to his enemy), verse 9 (reference to the violence of the wicked), and verses 14-16 (a description of the wicked and violent).

2. What does the psalmist ask God to do to him if he is guilty of anger without good cause?

In verses 3 and 4 the writer tells God to permit his pursuer to catch and trample him if the psalmist is guilty.

3. When the psalmist says, "Judge me, O Lord," (v. 8) what do you think he is really asking God?

The writer is begging the Lord to take up his cause and to defend and protect him against the pursuit and unjust accusations of his enemy. God is pictured in these verses as a lawyer or advocate who helps his people stand against the devil's accusations. The word *judge* in this case does not mean "to bring judgment" against the speaker but rather to defend him and punish his oppressive enemy.

4. What do we learn about God from reading Psalm 7?

Psalm 7 presents a picture of God as a righteous judge who wants to vindicate his people and will punish those who cause evil to his children. He is a shield and protector to all those who are picked on and persecuted.

5. What is the writer of Psalm 137 angry about?

The psalm writer is speaking for God's people who have been taken captive and carried away to a strange land (Babylon). He's angry because their captors are mistreating them, poking fun of them, and forcing them to sing the old familiar songs about Zion. This cruel teasing breaks the hearts of God's people; they find themselves unable to sing because the songs are too dear to them. It's impossible to sing joyful songs when they are so far from Jerusalem and the temple of God.

6. What curse does the writer call upon himself?

The psalmist asks for his tongue to be stilled (from singing) and his hand stopped from performing (playing his musical instrument) if he sings songs in Babylon that would desecrate or disregard his loyalty and love for Jerusalem.

7. After expressing his anger to God, what does the psalmist expect God to do?

He expects God to punish, to utterly crush, the enemies of God's people because of what they've done.

8. What kind of anger is pictured in these two psalms? Is all anger the same in God's eyes? What kinds of complaints can and should we bring to God, asking for his help?

Accept students' answers here, adding to the discussion to help them understand the difference between self-centered anger, which is petty and passing (you might ask for examples), and indignant anger over seeing others (or oneself) wrongfully treated by someone else. Encourage your students to think of examples in their own lives (at school, in the community, in the world) of the kind of anger described in the psalms you've just studied.

Step 3

Personal Responses

Here are some possibilities to choose from:

1. Rather than asking students to respond directly to today's lesson concept, you may prefer to use this time for reviewing the memory work from Psalm 84 (verses 1-4). After saying the verse together a few times, ask your students to write out the passage from memory on page 63 in their books. (If time permits, you may also want to review the other Psalm passages you've memorized so far.)
2. If writing short devotionals was a particularly meaningful activity last week, you may choose to have your students do so again today. (And, you may wish to add this week's collection to those they've already written before you compile and duplicate the entire set for them.)
3. Rather than ask your students to write devotionals, you might simply ask them to reflect on the anger they feel about some specific injustice, and write a prayer to God asking for his intervention and justice in that situation.
4. You might want to use the pictures on page 58 to stimulate a response from your students. Ask everyone to study the pictures and to select one that is particularly touching or strikes a familiar chord. Then ask them to write about it, imagining the feelings of the angry person or group and describing them. Ask your students to conclude their paragraphs with a sentence describing what God might do to bring relief or justice to that situation.

Step 4

Closing

Close today's lesson by inviting your students to suggest some injustices which anger them, situations you can bring to God in prayer. Then end with prayer to God, expressing your anger and asking him to bring his justice and healing love to each situation you've brought to him. Ask him, too, to help each of you examine your own anger, making sure its origin is not selfish or peevish. After saying "Amen," ask your students to remain quiet while you play for them the musical rendition of Psalm 137 (see cassette tape that accompanies this quarter).

WHEN IN DOUBT . . .

11

Memory Work

Students should add verses 3 and 4 (in dark type) to previous memory work:

¹I will exalt you, my God the King;
I will praise your name for ever and ever.

²Every day I will praise you
and extol your name for ever and ever.

³**Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
his greatness no one can fathom.**

⁴**One generation will commend your works to another;
they will tell of your mighty acts.**

Psalm 145:1-4

Scripture

Psalm 77

Lesson Truth

The psalmist teaches us to express openly to God our doubts and to remember God's care and deliverance.

Lesson Aims

General:

Students will realize that God wants us to express every feeling, including doubt, and to celebrate God's constant deliverance and greatness.

Specific:

Students will be able to

A. give examples of God's people expressing their honest doubts to him.

B. express their own doubts to God.

C. identify the psalmist's antidote for doubt.

Lesson Background

To many people doubt is the opposite of faith. They define doubt as a denial of God, a rejection of his salvation, and accordingly as an emotion that could never be expressed directly to the Lord. For how can one speak of doubting to God if that very doubt denies the existence of the One being addressed?

In some cases this is true; but not always. There is another sort of doubt that is allied to faith, that can deepen and strengthen faith, that can lead to true faith. Job expressed this faith-based kind of doubt. In the face of a loved one's death or of severe suffering, a believer may voice such a doubt when he or she cries, "Where are you, God?" This is the doubt that searches for the living God, the Lord who can and will set all things right and answer all our probing human questions.

The writer of Psalm 77 expresses this kind of faith-based doubt. In deep distress, the psalmist wonders aloud why God does not act, why the Lord does not answer his urgent prayers. "Has God forgotten to be merciful?" he asks (v. 9). Then remembering how often in the past the Lord has shown his grace and mercy, the writer is comforted. This assures him that the great and powerful God will continue to redeem his people. So the memory of God's past answers to prayer leads the psalmist from doubt to renewed trust.

John Calvin says of this psalm,

Whoever was the penman of this psalm the Holy Spirit seems, by his mouth, to have dictated a common form of prayer for the Church in her afflictions, that even under the most cruel persecutions the faithful might not fail to address their prayers to heaven. It is not the private grief of some particular individual which is here expressed, but the lamentations and groanings of the chosen people. The faithful celebrate the deliverance which had been once wrought for them, and which was a testimony of God's everlasting grace, to animate and strengthen themselves to engage in the exercise of prayer with the greater earnestness (*Commentary on the Psalms*, p. 679).

Teenagers will doubt. In our society they are encouraged—almost required—to challenge the beliefs, views, and mores instilled in them from childhood by parents, teachers, family, and church. Movies, songs, TV, peers, and even some teachers urge them to put a large question mark after parental and church authority. You cannot hope to stop or divert this process.

Your task is rather to make sure their doubts are honest, not dishonest, and addressed to God openly, not to themselves secretly.

There are dishonest doubts. These are excuses to reject the truth rather than ways to find out what is the truth. An example is the person who cites a problem her father had with some pastor twenty years ago as the reason why she doubts the church's (and Christ's) sincere love. Or the one who claims the dogmatic, uncaring instruction of one particular teacher is a true model of all the church's teaching. Or the person who uses a story of one believer's hidden sin to question the sincerity of all Christians. Dishonest doubt looks for an excuse to avoid the call of Christ and to justify oneself in that avoidance.

Honest doubt is very different. It stands before God and expresses openly the hesitations and questionings of the heart. Honest doubt speaks of fears and perplexities, of teachings that don't seem to make sense, and of the ways of God that don't fit our expectations.

Honest doubt, like that of this psalmist and of Job, is welcomed by God. It leads to true prayer and sincere struggles. It contends with the living God; like John the Baptist who sent messengers directly to Jesus to express his doubts (Matt. 11), like Peter whose denials led to repentance (Luke 22:62), like Thomas whose skepticism ended in the heartfelt cry of faith, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

Encourage in your students this sort of honest doubt that springs from and leads to faith. This is the doubt voiced in Psalm 77.

Materials

Teacher

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Bible
3. Special guest (see optional activity)
4. Song (optional), see back of manual

Students

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Three-by-five-inch cards (one per student)
3. Bibles
4. Pens or pencils

Lesson at a Glance

Step 1: Students think about and discuss whether Christians ever experience doubts, then write down some of their own unanswered questions about faith (10 minutes).

Step 2: Students study and discuss illustrations in the student book that show God wants us to express our doubts to him (10 minutes).

Step 3: Students read and discuss Psalm 77, using discussion questions as a guide (20 minutes).

Step 4: Students respond by writing about their own doubts (10 minutes).

Step 5: Students close by reciting today's memory work, then the verse by Christina Rossetti as a closing prayer (5 minutes).

Introduction

"The quality of human relationship is the major formative religious influence in childhood and adolescence, and all that is taught stands or falls by the kind of relationship which exists between teachers and their pupils," says Ronald Goldman in his book *Readiness for Religion* (p. 194). If you believe this to be at least somewhat true, then your task as a teacher of junior high students is especially critical today as you speak honestly with your young adolescents about their doubts and questions.

That young people do doubt and question the basic tenets of their faith is not unusual; most Christians can testify that at some point in their spiritual development, doubts and questions have played a formative role. And young teenagers are no exception. It is at this point in their development that they often begin to wonder about their faith. Should they believe in God simply because parents and teachers have taught them to throughout their childhood years? Does what they've been taught to believe make sense, measured by the yardstick of their emerging powers of logic? Is one's childlike faith something to discard along with dolls, snowpants, and bedtime stories? Today, listen to and acknowledge your students' questions about God in an atmosphere of love and understanding, even as God himself invites and listens to the doubts of his people. Then gently encourage your seventh and eighth graders to persevere by bringing their questions to God and remembering his greatness and love.

Step 1

Introducing the Lesson

Begin your time together by posing this statement to your students: Good Christians who are secure in their faith in Jesus will never be troubled by doubts or question their beliefs. Ask your group to think about the implications of this statement for a moment before telling you whether it appears true or false to them. Then talk about it for a few minutes, accepting your students' opinions and listening to their reasons before telling them that most Christians at some time in their lives do experience doubts and questions about their faith. Follow your conversation by asking your students to think for a moment about some of their own unanswered questions. What difficult questions would they ask God if they had an opportunity to hear his answers today? If time permits, distribute three-by-five-inch cards and ask your students to write down three questions about God or their faith that are especially puzzling. (Do this exercise yourself too.) Collect the cards (no names necessary) and quickly read some or all of the questions aloud to the group, pointing out questions that recur. Conclude by telling your students that today's lesson is not meant to answer all of their serious questions, but to show that God invites us to bring our doubts and questions to him. And he invites us to think back and remember his faithful love and care as it has showed itself in our lives and the lives of those we love.

Note: You might want to extend an invitation to your students who do have pressing faith questions to talk with you privately after class or at some later time.

Step 2

Case Studies

Comment to your students that the Bible itself provides the best evidence for believing that God invites us to bring our doubts and questions freely to him. Distribute Bibles, student books, and pencils and ask everyone to turn to pages 64 and 65 and examine the illustrations and questions printed there. Then, depending on your time limitations, assign the illustrations to students or small groups for further study. Provide time for looking up the passage indicated by each illustration and for answering the accompanying questions. When the students have completed their work, get back together for a recap, using their answers to illustrate the point of today's lesson: God wants us to express our doubts and questions to him. He will not reject his people when their faith falters.

Step 3

Bible Study: Psalm 77

Next turn to page 66 and read Psalm 77 aloud together. (You might want to assign student readers for portions of the passage.) Then work through the study questions together, using the following comments as guidelines for your discussion.

1. What has caused the psalm writer to doubt? Why is he so full of questions as he writes this psalm? What situations in your own life sometimes cause you to doubt and question God?

The psalmist is questioning God's apparent refusal to answer his prayers or to provide comfort for his soul. The writer says he has cried out to God and yet feels no peace. He's left wondering whether God has abandoned him or whether God will ever listen to him. It's as if, out of desperation, the writer is screaming, "Where are you, God?"

Follow your analysis of the psalmist's situation by recounting situations in which you, your students, or others you know have felt overcome by similar doubts and questions. Again, remind your students that such periods of questioning and searching are reflections of our own frailty as people; and it's in such times of doubt and uncertainty that God wants to draw us to himself so that he can remind us of his love for us.

2. What questions does the psalmist ask of God? Rephrase the questions in your own words, making them personal and addressing them directly to God.

The psalmist's questions are listed in verses 7-9. Taking the questions one by one, ask individual students to put the questions into their own words. Make a list on your board or a piece of newsprint as you work through the sequence; then asterisk those questions that strike a familiar chord with members of the class, questions they (or you) may have also asked at some point in their lives.

3. The writer's questions in verses 7-9 imply a feeling that God has somehow vanished or at least taken himself out of the picture for awhile. What would God's absence really mean for all of us? What would your life be like without God's presence?

Spend a few minutes with your students trying to imagine what life would be like without God's nearness. Help them conclude that without his presence we would not experience his favor, his love, his mercy, his compassion. We would feel completely rejected, alone, and without hope.

4. What does the psalmist do to actively deal with his doubts and questions? (Check verses 5 and 6 and verses 11 through 20.)

These verses give a clear remedy for doubt. The psalmist remembers. He recalls the deeds the Lord has done for his people; he meditates on the Lord's deliverance in specific situations, particularly the salvation of the Israelites under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. The psalmist uses verbs like *meditate*, *consider*, and *remember* to describe his way of confronting doubt—a remedy that he himself takes responsibility for, a remedy that works! (You may wish to point out that this theme of remembering God's faithfulness is a refrain that permeates the Psalms and ultimately leads God's people out of discouragement to a response of renewed trust and spontaneous praise.)

5. What can we learn from the psalmist's way of expressing and dealing with his own discouragement and doubt?

Accept students' answers here, emphasizing and highlighting both the psalmist's openness and honesty in bringing his questions to the Lord, as well as the remedy he uses to deal with his doubt—recalling the Lord's goodness and faithfulness in the past. You might also conclude your conversation by adding that honest doubt often serves in the long run to strengthen our faith because it leads us to examine our relationship with the Lord, to approach him with our feelings, and to reflect on what he has done and promises to do in our lives.

Step 4

Personal Responses

Provide time for your students to write about their own doubts. Write the following sentence starters on your board and ask the students to write their own responses on page 68 in their books:

I seem to doubt and question God most when . . .

When I begin to have feelings of doubt, I usually react by . . .

It helps me to know God is there and in control when I remember . . .

Step 5

Closing

You might want to end your session by concentrating on today's memory work, yet another psalm emphasizing the importance of recounting God's greatness as revealed in his mighty acts. Read verses 1-4 of Psalm 145 in unison with expression! Then, also in unison, read the verse by Christina Rossetti on page 69 of the student book as your closing prayer. This particular poem is a prayer for God's presence all around us and his protection from worldly attractions which draw us away from him.

Before dismissing your students make sure they have their take-home sheets. You may also want to say a word about next week's praise celebration. Encourage everyone to come with something (a poem, a recorded song, a beautiful drawing or photograph) to contribute to your celebration of God's goodness in your lives.

Optional Activity

Consider inviting a guest to come to speak to your students about his or her experience with doubts and questions. Select someone who will be able to relate well to seventh and eighth graders, someone whose experience will speak to their hearts (perhaps a new convert, or a person who has dealt with a handicap or the death of a loved one, or someone who has struggled to make a decision to profess his faith). Beforehand, be sure to explain the theme of today's lesson (bringing our doubts to God, recalling his past goodness) so that your guest can prepare his or her remarks accordingly and in a way that is encouraging and helpful to your students.

HALLELUJAH!

12

Memory Work	Review previous passages
Scripture	Psalms 145 and Psalm 150
Lesson Truth	God's people joyfully respond to him with exuberant praise for who he is and what he does for his people.
Lesson Aims	<p>General: Students will understand that God wants his people to praise him in all they do.</p> <p>Specific: Students will be able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. tell when, where, and how God's people praise him.B. identify two primary kinds of praise found in the psalms.C. find evidence of the psalmist's exuberance and enthusiasm for praising God.D. compose their own psalms of praise to God.
Lesson Background	<p>In the first lesson's background, I mentioned that the Hebrew title for the psalms is "Praises" (<i>tehillim</i>). Now as you near the end of this course, that title should have taken on deeper significance for you and your students. All the thoughts and feelings expressed in the psalms you have been studying end with a note of praise. Praise is the true beginning and end of Psalms.</p> <p>Their worship function finally determines the tone and content of these poems. They were intended to declare God's worth and to commemorate his dignity, goodness, and greatness. In other words, they are meant to praise God by commenting on his worth and responding to his majesty.</p> <p>Sometimes praise is declarative—recalling what the Lord did on a particular occasion; sometimes it is descriptive—mentioning the acts he habitually does and the facets of his being shown by such acts. Always it centers on divine acts and qualities.</p> <p>Psalms 145 is the only song in this entire collection entitled "A psalm of praise." Vital to Israel's worship, this particular hymn was sung twice at every morning service and once in the afternoon. This song to the Great King praised his nature (v. 3), his wonderful deeds (vv. 8-9), and his eternal kingdom (vv. 13-20). Typical of Hebrew psalmody and unlike much contemporary hymnody, it centers on God's action rather than our own, on God's grace rather than our faith.</p> <p>Psalms 150 was probably written especially to be the doxology for the entire book. It expresses the purpose of all these psalms—"Praise the Lord." Moving in stages from the place of worship, to themes of worship, to the orchestra, to the choir, it ends as it began—with a great hallelujah.</p> <p>In his <i>Reflections on the Psalms</i>, C. S. Lewis remarks that praise is not just complimentary, approving or giving honor to someone. Beyond those activities, praise is a completion of our own enjoyment of anything or anyone. Consider your own experiences. After attending a fine concert, seeing a really good movie,</p>

hearing an excellent song well sung, seeing an extraordinary sports event, you naturally turn to someone else and say how good that experience has been. We want others to join us in such praise. "I think," says Lewis, "we delight to praise what we enjoy because praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation" (p. 95).

Ask your students whether praising someone doesn't make them feel better. Urge them to try saying complimentary things about friends, parents, a brother or sister, a teacher. Such praise may mention good qualities, describe good things done, or tell what that person means to them. Praise helps us see the good in others. How much more will praise help us see God's goodness.

By studying the feelings expressed by ancient poets to God, this course also has attempted to encourage your students to a new openness and honesty in speaking to God. It has tried to help them to explore Christianly an often-ignored yet vital area of their young lives—their emotions.

In these twelve lessons, they should have come to recognize that their feelings are not always good and right. Our common North American notion that feelings just are, and need to be accepted without questions clashes head on with the Psalms. Even our best emotions need repair, the Psalms teach. Like everything else we are and do, our feelings are also sinful and often miss the mark.

But such correction is possible. The first step is to bring our feelings honestly to God. If we wait for perfection, we could bring nothing to God. We are right in his holy eyes only through Jesus Christ. But in Christ, we can and should bring everything we are, do, think, and feel before our heavenly Father.

Being able in this way to express what we feel in our deepest hearts to our Lord can be a tremendous relief and a wonderful release. If your students have experienced something of that wonder and found a new closeness to their God, you will have accomplished the main purpose of this course.

Materials

Teacher

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Bible
3. *Honest to God* cassette
4. Tape player
5. Song (optional), see back of manual
6. Hymnals (optional)
7. Praise music (optional)

Students

1. *Bible Crossroads*
2. Pencils
3. Three-by-five-inch cards (optional; see step 1)

Lesson at a Glance

- Step 1: Students are introduced to the theme of praise using one of the suggested activities (10 minutes).
- Step 2: Students study and discuss Psalms 145 and 150, using discussion questions as a guide (20 minutes).
- Step 3: Students write their own praise psalm (15 minutes).
- Step 4: Students share objects of praise with the class, concluding with prayer of praise using Psalm 150 (10 minutes).

Introduction

Students will realize that God invites his people to express their feelings to him honestly and openly. That was our general aim for lesson 1—and indeed for this entire course on the Psalms. You might want to reflect on that aim in the light of the lessons you've taught and the emotions you've discussed with your students, emotions such as wonder, fear, longing, envy, joy, anger, doubt. Having taken this course, are your young people more likely to express, either openly or privately, their deepest feelings to the Lord? If you suspect so, then praise God for his work in the hearts of your seventh and eighth graders!

Today's concluding lesson is one of praise to the Lord. But it's intended to provide more than a tidy wrap-up for a series of lessons on expressing one's feelings to God. Its intent is to teach young people that praise is more than just another emotion or feeling (like doubt, wonder, or anger) to share with God. Praise is an emotional response to God that permeates all of our other outpourings of feeling to him. It outlasts, transcends, and colors our expressions of other emotions. Praise is our reason for being! And nowhere is that purpose for living written more clearly than in the Psalms. Don't let your students conclude this series of lessons without a clear impression of the Psalms as the praise book of God's people.

Step 1

Introducing the Lesson

There are a number of ways you might lead your students into the subject of praise. Either use one of the following suggestions—or try something you think your own group of junior highers might find especially stimulating and inviting.

1. You might begin with music. Play a recording of lively praise music as your students arrive and take their seats. (The "Hallelujah Chorus" or a piece of contemporary praise music your students enjoy are possibilities.) Then spend a few minutes talking about the music and what its words, tempo, and melody express. You might also want to distribute hymnals and page through them quickly, looking for other illustrations of music written especially to praise God. Conclude by asking your students to suggest some other ways, besides music, in which God's people express praise and thanksgiving to him.
2. Or you might begin by talking about praise in general. Ask students to define praise in simple terms and suggest some objects of their own praise. Talk about why we praise something or someone, how we usually give praise, when we do it, and so forth. Help your students conclude that praise is something we usually do spontaneously, out of a feeling of admiration or appreciation for someone or something. Praise is also something we share with others out of excitement about something special: we praise a good movie and encourage others to see it too; we admire a coach or teacher and invite friends to agree with us; we appreciate a classmate's solo performance and enthusiastically comment on it at the supper table. Conclude your conversation by comparing praise of others to praising God himself: we do it spontaneously, and we want to share our excitement with others.
3. Another possibility: ask your students to think about their prayers for a moment. What do they generally consist of? Students will probably mention that they thank God for certain things and ask God for other things. Some may mention praying for forgiveness; others might say they praise God in their prayers. As the group mentions these various components of prayer, list them on your board. Then ask the group to divide the list into proportions of 100 percent to show how much of their prayer time is devoted to needs, to thanks, to praise, and so forth. Comment that the book of Psalms, while providing illustrations of many kinds of prayers to God, is first of all a prayer book of praise to him.

4. Still another way to begin is with the book of Psalms itself. Distribute Bibles, pencils, and three-by-five-inch cards or small pieces of paper to your students. Ask everyone to page through the Psalms, watching for verses that express praise to God. Ask each student to settle on one or two verses that seem especially lively and expressive and to write them, along with the reference, on a card. (Do this yourself too.) Then put the praise verses your group has selected together to form a litany of praise. Begin by reading the praise statement you have selected; then invite the group to respond with a refrain such as "Oh, God, we will praise you in all we do!" or "Lord, you deserve our praise every day!" Continue around your group, inviting each member to add his verse(s) of praise and responding after each selection with the group refrain.

5. Or play the taped presentation of the poem "Individuation," which is also printed on page 71 of the student book. (You might want to distribute books and invite students to follow the words as they listen to the poem.) Spend a few minutes afterward talking about the author's intent in writing the poem. (Praise!) Compare the author with the psalmists who used much the same approach in acknowledging God's greatness and praising him for his marvelous acts.

Step 2

Bible Study: Psalms 145 and 150

If you haven't already done so, distribute student books, pointing out to your students that this lesson will conclude the course on the Psalms. You might also mention that the title—Psalms—is really the word *tehillim*, which simply means "praises." All of the psalms, no matter which feeling the writer intends to express to God, seem to end up with a theme of praise to God for who he is and what he does. Today's psalms for study, 145 and 150, are psalms of pure praise to God. Turn to the two psalms on page 72 and read them aloud together before working through the questions. Or you may wish to divide your class into two groups today, asking each group to read and do the study questions for one of the psalms. Follow up their work with a brief group session to review their responses to the study.

1. The book of Psalms contains many poems or songs written simply to praise God. Each of these praise psalms has at least two parts: praise for God himself—who he is, what he's like; and praise for God's mighty acts—what he has done and promises to do for his people. In Psalm 145 find verses which fit into both categories of praise (God's traits, God's actions).

In verses 8-13, the psalmist talks about God's traits: God is great, good, righteous, gracious, slow to anger, loving, powerful, and faithful. In verses 14-20 he mentions God's acts: he upholds the falling, provides food, satisfies desires, hears the cries of his people, saves and preserves his children, and destroys the wicked.

2. Psalm 145 makes use of a device called parallelism, or repetition, a technique used often by psalm writers to make their poems singable. The writer repeats a line, stating it the second time in a slightly different way, giving it a new twist or adding a new thought to expand on the first line. Find at least five instances of this kind of parallelism in Psalm 145.

Accept students' responses here. Almost every verse in this psalm uses parallels, in almost all of which the second line restates in another way the meaning of the first line. As you identify these patterns, you might want to point out to your students that this is the one literary device that doesn't get destroyed when the psalms are translated into English.

3. List God's traits and God's actions mentioned by the psalmist in Psalm 145. Then summarize in one sentence the psalmist's picture of God.

See verses mentioned under question 1 for a listing of God's traits and acts. Ask a few students to read their summary sentences aloud to the group.

4. Psalm 150 answers four questions about praising the Lord: Where? Why? How? By whom? How does the psalmist answer each question?

Where? "in his sanctuary"

Why? "for his mighty deeds" and his greatness

How? with every possible instrument

Who? everything that breathes should join in to praise the Lord

Follow this question by applying the psalmist's answers to our own praise. Emphasize that our praise need not be limited to time and place. God wants our praise to flow spontaneously from our appreciation of his greatness and goodness. Conclude your conversation by asking your students to suggest other times, places, and ways in which we as God's people express our praise to him.

5. Many Christians associate worship and praise with restraint and quietness. Would the writer of Psalm 150 agree? Explain.

Ask your students to summarize how the psalmist would envision a worship service of praise. Then contrast the psalmist's description with worship services you are familiar and comfortable with. How are they similar? How do they differ? Encourage your students to suggest ways to make praise a more spontaneous and joyous part of worship.

6. The poem "Psalm," on page 73, is a modern poet's way of rewriting Psalm 150. Does she agree with the ancient psalmist? What does her use of the word *immoderate* mean?

Accept students' answers again, pointing out that the dictionary definition of *immoderate* is "exceeding usual bounds." Talk about the implications of this for the ways in which we praise God. You might want to conclude your discussion of Psalm 150 by telling the class that it was probably placed at the end of the book of Psalms because it calls for jubilant praise to God. It's the doxology (*doxology* means "call to praise") to the entire book of praises.

Step 3

Personal Responses

For a concluding response to the lesson, as well as to this course on the Psalms, ask your students to try their hands (and hearts!) at writing personal psalms of praise to God. Stress that their psalms need not be long or complex; rather, they should be simple and sincere.

To provide some structure to their thinking and writing, you could ask students to use the device of parallelism or repetition illustrated in Psalm 145. Another structural device demonstrated by the same psalm, but lost in translation, is the acrostic form. (Each verse in the psalm begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet.) You might want to describe this device to your students and suggest that they try using it by beginning the sentences of their praise psalms with the six letters that spell PRAISE. Still another way to help your students design and write their praise psalms is by providing them with these sentence starters:

I praise you, Lord, because . . . (name five specific reasons) . . .

When I see . . . (name five things) . . ., I praise your name.

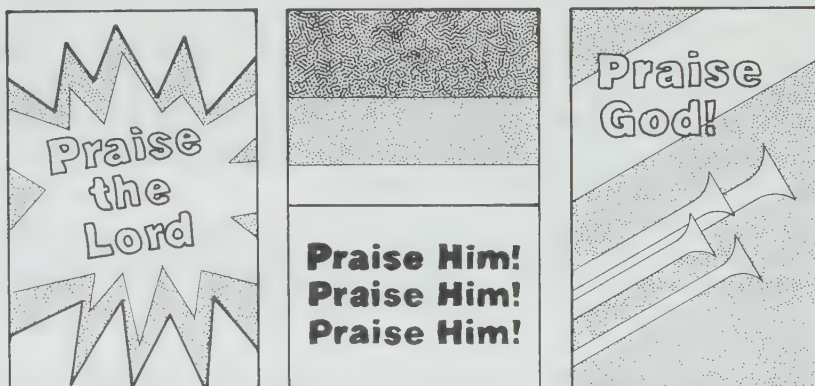
Step 4

Celebration

End your lesson with a time of praise involving your students as active participants. If, at the close of the last session, you asked each student to bring some personal offering of praise—a poem or reading, a musical piece, a photograph or illustration, an object from nature, whatever inspires their praise—to share with the group, ask each student to tell the others how his or her offering inspires one to praise God. Some students may simply want to share an experience, an event, or a beautiful sight that has led them to acknowledge God's greatness and goodness. Conclude your celebration by reciting together the words of Psalm 150 or Psalm 145:1-4 (memory work for lessons 10 and 11). Or, if you put together an opening litany of praise in step 1 (see option 4), use it once again to close your session. As you end your prayer of praise, ask students to remain seated and listen quietly to the hymn version of Psalm 150 (see tape that accompanies this quarter).

Optional Activities

1. If you can devote at least two or three more class sessions to this Psalms course, consider making praise banners with your students. Here are some designs to start your thinking, but asking your students to design their own might make the activity more meaningful to them.



You'll need to plan with your group, purchase materials, and set aside time to work together on the banners. Also think about how your finished banners might be used or displayed. You could use them in your own classroom or elsewhere in your church building. Or you could give them as a gift to a nearby group home or nursing center. Accompany your gift with a visit from your students and perhaps some spontaneous praise caroling in the corridors or rooms of those you visit.

2. To assist you in your closing praise time, you might want to invite a guest musician, preferably someone who plays the piano or guitar well and has a repertoire of songs your students will know and enjoy singing. Or ask your guest to teach the group a new song of praise or a song from another culture, sung in another language to emphasize the universality of praise to God by his people everywhere.

3. If you wish to follow up on the learning your students have done during this course, you might want to send them home with the tear-out test at the back of their student books (see page 99). Ask your students to spend an hour during the coming week reflecting on what they've experienced and learned from the lessons on the Psalms, completing the test, and returning it to you next week. You may wish to send the student books home too and permit your students to use them as a resource for their ideas and responses. Encourage your students to show their books to their parents too. (Whether or not you wish to grade or evaluate their tests is up to you, but do write comments on them, along with your hopes for your students' emerging spirituality.)

1 My God! O my God! Have you left me a - lone?
 2 Yet you are the Ho - ly One, Is - ra - el's King,
 3 Yet I am a worm who is laughed at and mocked,
 4 Since I was a ba - by, de - pen - dent and weak,

Why have you for - sak - en me, deaf to my groan?
 to whom all our fa - thers and moth - ers did sing.
 de - spised by the god - less who saun - ter a - bout.
 I nes - tled in safe - ty, LORD, close to your cheek.

I cry to you dai - ly and plead late at night,
 They count - ed on you to come through when they prayed;
 "His help is the LORD! Fool - ish fel - low," they sneer,
 Please don't go a - way, for deep trou - ble is near!

but you do not an - swer or pit - y my plight.
 when - ev - er they trust - ed, then you al - ways saved.
 "let God set him free since he counts him so dear."
 Who else can se - cure me and keep a - way fear?

Descant

5 Your good - ness and your gra - cious love pur -

1 The LORD, my shep - herd, rules my life and
 2 The LORD re - vives my fail - ing strength, he
 3 Though in a val - ley dark as death, no
 4 While all my en - e - mies look on, you
 5 Your good - ness and your gra - cious love pur -

sue me all my days; your house, O LORD, shall

gives me all I need; he leads me by re -
 makes my joy com - plete; and in right paths, for
 e - vil makes me fear; your shep - herd's staff pro -
 spread a roy - al feast; you fill my cup, a -
 sue me all my days; your house, O LORD, shall

be my home— your name, my end - less praise.

fresh - ing streams; in pas - tures green I feed.
 his name's sake, he guides my fal - tering feet.
 tects my way, for you are with me there.
 noint my head, and treat me as your guest.
 be my home— your name, my end - less praise.

1 Re - buke me not in an - ger, LORD; your ar - rows
 2 My sin - ful fol - ly brought me low; bowed down, I
 3 You know my sighs and weak - ness, Lord, my blind - ed
 4 My mouth is mute, I can - not speak; my ear is

wound and bring de - spair. My guilt is like a
 groan in an - guished grief. I have no strength, for
 eyes and throb - bing heart. Friends and com - pan - ions
 deaf, I can - not hear. I wait for you to

heav - y load that is too much for me to bear.
 I am crushed and spend my days with no re - lief.
 stand far off while oth - ers plot to seek my hurt.
 an - swer, LORD, to si - lence those who boast and jeer.

5 My pain is ever with me, LORD,
 for I have sinned against your laws.
 My foes are mighty—those who hate
 and slander me without a cause.

6 Do not forsake me, O my LORD;
 do not go far from me, my God.
 Come quickly, help me now, I pray,
 O Lord, my Savior and my God.

Capo 3: F(D) Bb(G) F(D) Bb(G) F(D)

1 Your Spir - it, O LORD, makes life to a - bound.
 2 My soul, praise the LORD! The LORD is most great,
 3 He rides on the clouds and wings of the storm.
 4 On moun - tains and plains the dark wa - ters lay.

Dm(Bm) Gm⁷(Em⁷) C(A) F(D) C/G(A/E) G⁷(E⁷) C(A)

The earth is re - newed, and fruit - ful the ground.
 with glo - ry ar - rayed, ma - jes - tic in state.
 The light - ning and wind his mis - sion per - form.
 They heard his re - buke and hur - ried a - way.

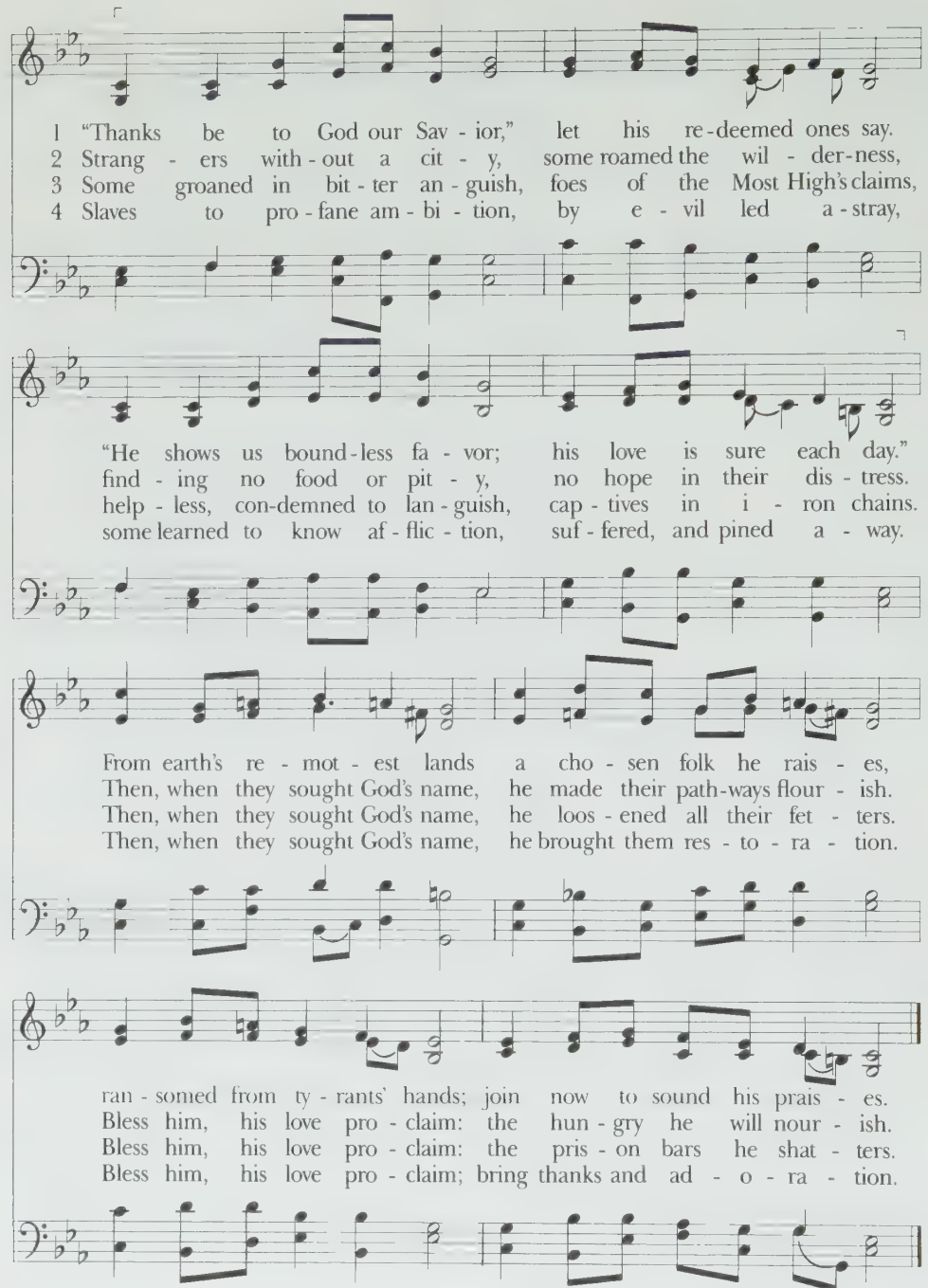
F(D) C(A) F(D) Bb(G) F(D)

To God be all glo - ry and wis - dom and might.
 The light is his gar - ment, the skies form a tent,
 Foun - da - tions of earth he for - ev - er has stayed;
 He lift - ed the moun - tains, to val - leys gave birth,

F⁷(D⁷) Gm(Em) C⁷(A⁷) F(D) Gm(Em) F/C(D/A) C(A) F(D)

May God in his crea - tures for - ev - er de - light.
 and o - ver the wa - ters his cou - riers are sent.
 to cov - er it, o - ceans like gar - ments were laid.
 set bound - aries for seas that once cov - ered the earth.
 Repeat stanza 1

- 5 God causes the springs of water to flow
in streams from the hills to valleys below.
The LORD gives the streams for all living things there,
while birds with their singing enrapture the air.
- 6 Down mountains and hills your showers are sent.
With fruit of your work the earth is content.
You give grass for cattle and food for our toil,
enriching our labors with bread, wine, and oil.
- 7 The trees that the LORD has planted are fed,
and over the earth their branches are spread.
They keep in their shelter the birds of the air.
The life of each creature God keeps in his care. *Repeat stanza 1*
- 8 The seasons are fixed by wisdom divine.
The slow-changing moon shows forth God's design.
The sun in its circuit its Maker obeys
and, running its journey, hastes not nor delays.
- 9 The LORD makes the night, when, leaving their lair,
the lions go forth, God's bounty to share.
The LORD makes the morning, when beasts steal away,
when we are beginning the work of the day.
- 10 How many and wise the works of the LORD!
The earth with its wealth of creatures is stored.
The sea bears in safety the ships to and fro;
Leviathan plays in the waters below.
- 11 Your creatures all look to you for their food.
Your hand opens wide, they gather the good.
When you hide your face, LORD, in anguish they yearn;
when you stop their breathing, to dust they return. *Repeat stanza 1*
- 12 Before the LORD's might earth trembles and quakes.
The mountains are rent, and smoke from them breaks.
I promise to worship the LORD all my days.
Yes, while I have being, my God I will praise.
- 13 Rejoicing in God, my thought shall be sweet.
May sinners depart in ruin complete.
My soul, praise the LORD God—his name be adored.
Come, praise him, all people, and worship the LORD.



1 "Thanks be to God our Sav - ior," let his re-deemed ones say.
 2 Strang - ers with - out a cit - y, some roamed the wil - der-ness,
 3 Some groaned in bit - ter an - guish, foes of the Most High's claims,
 4 Slaves to pro - fane am - bi - tion, by e - vil led a - stray,

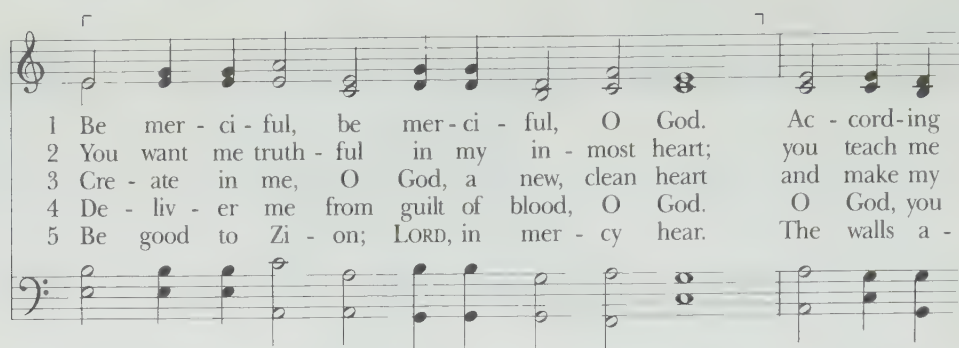
"He shows us bound-less fa - vor; his love is sure each day."
 find - ing no food or pit - y, no hope in their dis - tress.
 help - less, con-demned to lan - guish, cap - tives in i - ron chains.
 some learned to know af - flic - tion, suf - fered, and pined a - way.

From earth's re - mot - est lands a cho - sen folk he rais - es,
 Then, when they sought God's name, he made their path-ways flour - ish.
 Then, when they sought God's name, he loos - ened all their fet - ters.
 Then, when they sought God's name, he brought them res - to - ra - tion.

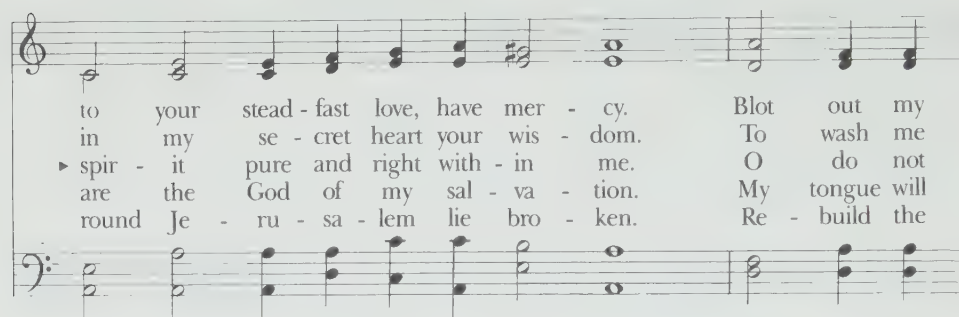
ran - somed from ty - rants' hands; join now to sound his prais - es.
 Bless him, his love pro - claim: the hun - gry he will nour - ish.
 Bless him, his love pro - claim: the pris - on bars he shat - ters.
 Bless him, his love pro - claim; bring thanks and ad - o - ra - tion.

5 Storms thundered forth his power
to those who sailed the seas.
Winds lashed them hour by hour;
waves dashed them to their knees.
Then, when they sought God's name,
he calmed the raging weather.
Bless him, his love proclaim
where all his people gather.

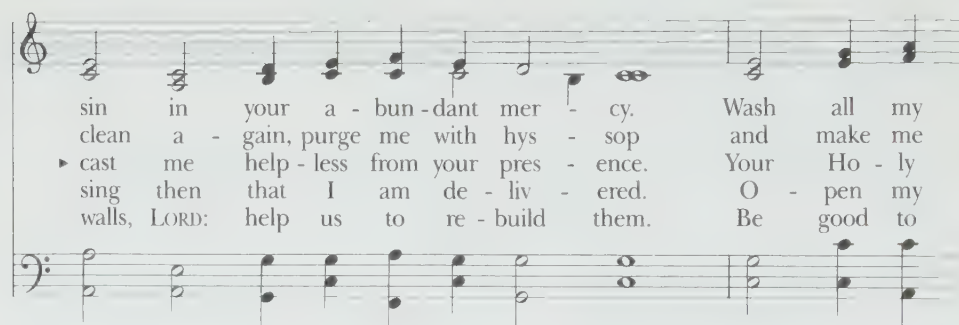
6 His word brings desolation
where evil deeds abound,
but for his faithful nation
springs flow from barren ground.
Bounty he sends the meek;
the mighty prince he plunders.
His loving-kindness seek;
consider all his wonders.



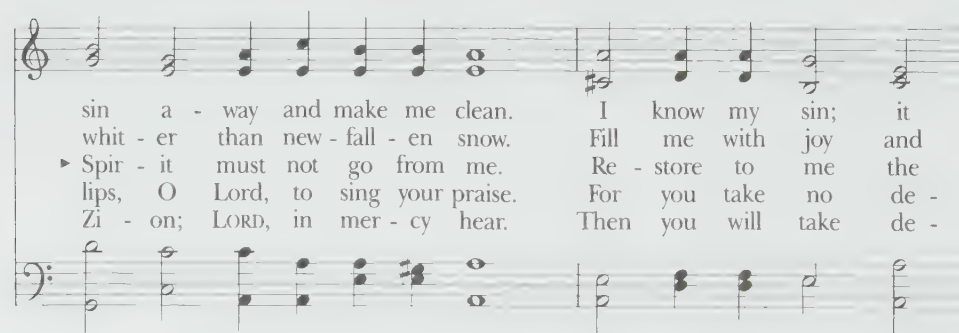
1 Be mer - ci - ful, be mer - ci - ful, O God. Ac - cord - ing
2 You want me truth - ful in my in - most heart; you teach me
3 Cre - ate in me, O God, a new, clean heart and make my
4 De - liv - er me from guilt of blood, O God. O God, you
5 Be good to Zi - on; LORD, in mer - cy hear. The walls a -



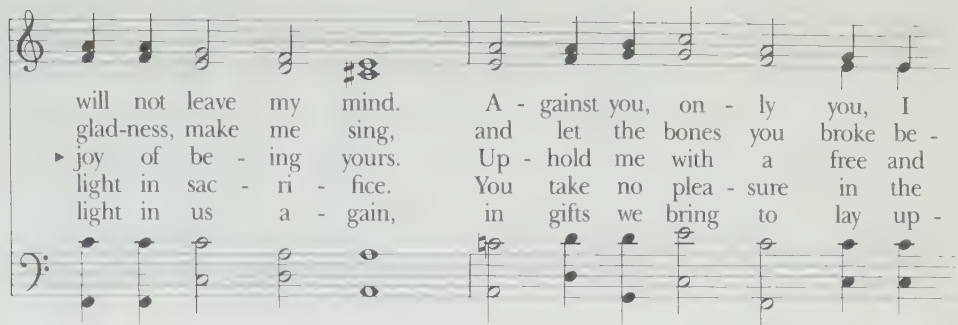
to your stead - fast love, have mer - cy. Blot out my
in my se - cret heart your wis - dom. To wash me
► spir - it pure and right with - in me. O do not
are the God of my sal - va - tion. My tongue will
round Je - ru - sa - lem lie bro - ken. Re - build the



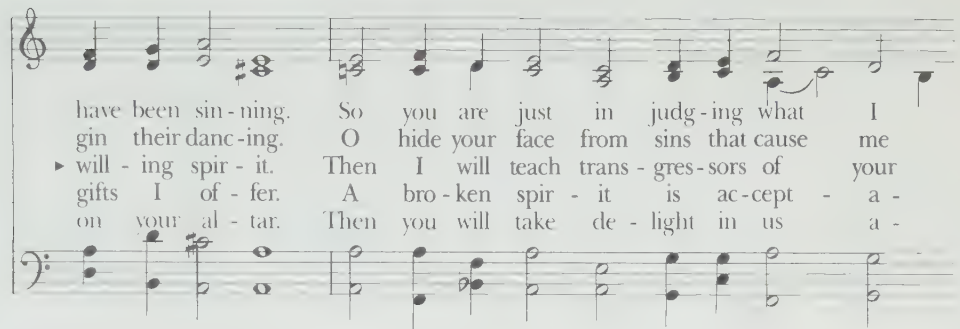
sin in your a - bun - dant mer - cy. Wash all my
clean a - gain, purge me with hys - sop and make me
► cast me help - less from your pres - ence. Your Ho - ly
sing then that I am de - liv - ered. O - pen my
walls, LORD: help us to re - build them. Be good to



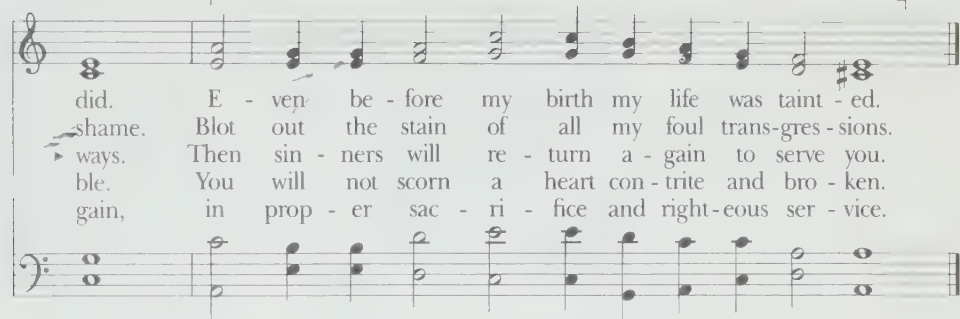
sin a - way and make me clean. I know my sin; it
whit - er than new - fall - en snow. Fill me with joy and
► Spir - it must not go from me. Re - store to me the
lips, O Lord, to sing your praise. For you take no de -
Zi - on; LORD, in mer - cy hear. Then you will take de -



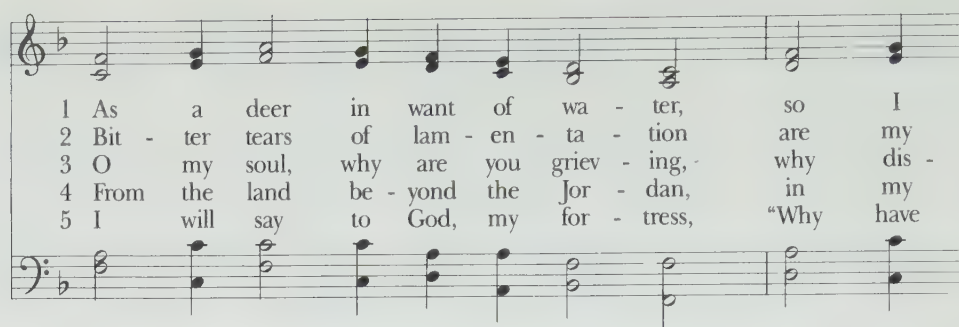
will not leave my mind. A - gainst you, on - ly you, I
 glad-ness, make me sing, and let the bones you broke be -
 joy of be - ing yours. Up - hold me with a free and
 light in sac - ri - fice. You take no plea - sure in the
 light in us a - gain, in gifts we bring to lay up -



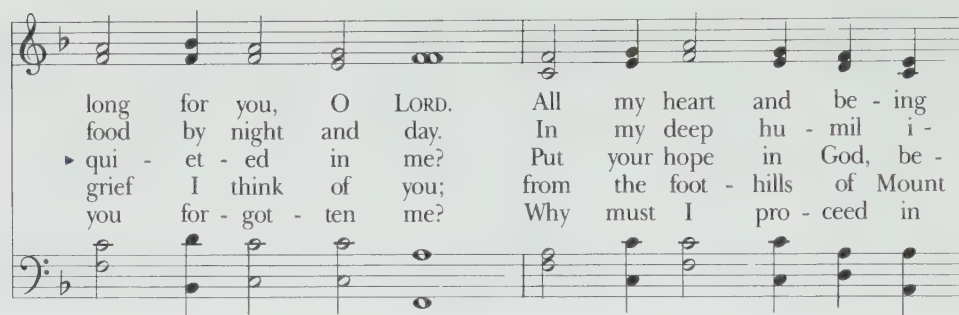
have been sin - ning. So you are just in judg - ing what I
 gin their danc - ing. O hide your face from sins that cause me
 will - ing spir - it. Then I will teach trans - gres - sors of your
 gifts I of - fer. A bro - ken spir - it is ac - cept - a -
 on your al - tar. Then you will take de - light in us a -



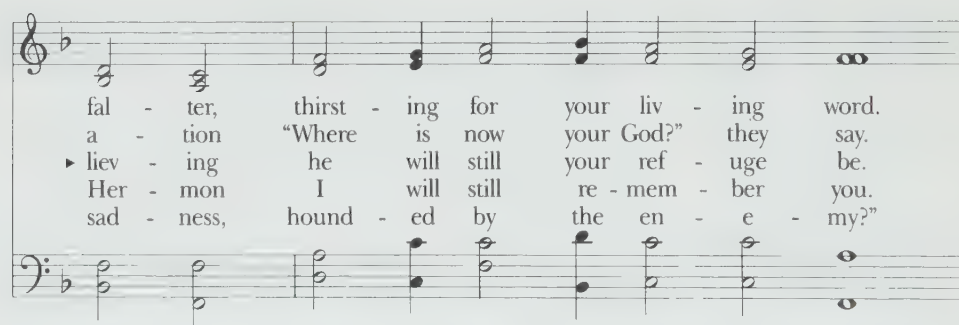
did. E - ven be - fore my birth my life was taint - ed.
 shame. Blot out the stain of all my foul trans - gres - sions.
 ways. Then sin - ners will re - turn a - gain to serve you.
 ble. You will not scorn a heart con - trite and bro - ken.
 gain, in prop - er sac - ri - fice and right - eous ser - vice.



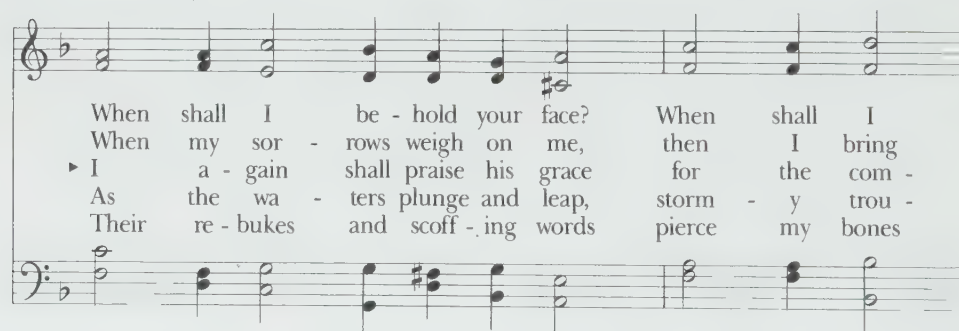
1 As a deer in want of wa - ter, so I
 2 Bit - ter tears of lam - en - ta - tion are my
 3 O my soul, why are you griev - ing, why dis -
 4 From the land be - yond the Jor - dan, in my
 5 I will say to God, my for - tress, "Why have



long for you, O LORD. All my heart and be - ing
 food by night and day. In my deep hu - mil i -
 ▶ qui - et - ed in me? Put your hope in God, be -
 grief I think of you; from the foot - hills of Mount
 you for - got - ten me? Why must I pro - ceed in



fal - ter, thirst - ing for your liv - ing word.
 a - tion "Where is now your God?" they say.
 ▶ liev - ing he will still your ref - uge be.
 Her - mon I will still re - mem - ber you.
 sad - ness, hound - ed by the en - e - my?"



When shall I be - hold your face? When shall I
 When my sor - rows weigh on me, then I bring
 ▶ I a - gain shall praise his grace for the com -
 As the wa - ters plunge and leap, storm - y trou -
 Their re - bukes and scoff - ing words pierce my bones


re - ceive your grace? When shall I, your prais - es
 to mem - o - ry how with throngs I would as -
 ▶ fort of his face; he will show his help and
 bles o'er me sweep. Day and night God's song is
 like point - ed swords, as they say with proud de -

voic - ing, come be - fore you with re - joic - ing?
 sem - ble, shout - ing prais - es in your tem - ple.
 ▶ fa - vor, for he is my God and Sav - ior.
 with me as a prayer to him who loves me.
 fi - ance, "Where is God, your firm re - li - ance?" *Repeat st. 3*


Psalm 43

6 Vindicate me, God, my Father,
 come and plead my urgent cause,
 for my enemies forever
 threaten me and flout your laws.
 I am safe with you alone;
 why do you reject your own?
 LORD, I need your help and blessing;
 keep me safe from this oppressing.

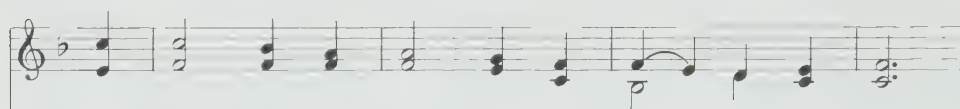
7 Send your light and truth to lead me:
 send them forth to be my guide.
 To your mountain let them bring me,
 to the place where you reside.
 Then, O God, I will come near
 and before your throne appear,
 to my Savior praises bringing
 with the harp and joyful singing. *Repeat st. 3*




1 God loves all the right - eous; his good - ness is sure.
 2 The wick - ed all pros - per, and firm is their health;
 3 In gar - ments of boast - ing and vi - o - lence decked,
 4 They ques - tion God's knowl - edge and bold - ly de - fy



He al - ways re - mem - bers the good and the pure.
 they suf - fer no pangs as they gath - er their wealth.
 with wealth more a - bun - dant than heart could ex - pect,
 the might and the jus - tice of God the Most High.



Yet once my faith fal - tered; I en - vied the proud.
 They nev - er are trou - bled with sick - ness or pain,
 they scoff at the help - less, make fun of the poor;
 The wick - ed, grown wealth - y, have com - fort and peace,



In doubt and dis - qui - et my spir - it was bowed.
 but boast to all oth - ers of ill - got - ten gain.
 with curs - es they charge a - gainst heav - en's own door.
 while I, dai - ly chas - tened, see trou - bles in - crease.

1 All peo - ple that on earth do dwell, sing to the
 2 Know that the LORD is God in - deed; he formed us
 3 O - en - ter then his gates with joy, with - in his
 4 Be - cause the LORD our God is good, his mer - cy

LORD with cheer - ful voice. Serve him with joy, his
 all with - out our aid. We are the flock he
 courts his praise pro - claim. Let thank - ful songs your
 is for - ev - er sure. His faith - ful - ness at

prais - es tell, come now be - fore him and re - joice!
 comes to feed, the sheep who by his hand were made.
 tongues em - ploy, O bless and mag - ni - fy his name.
 all times stood and shall from age to age en - dure.

Text: Psalm 100; vers. William Kethe, 1561, alt.

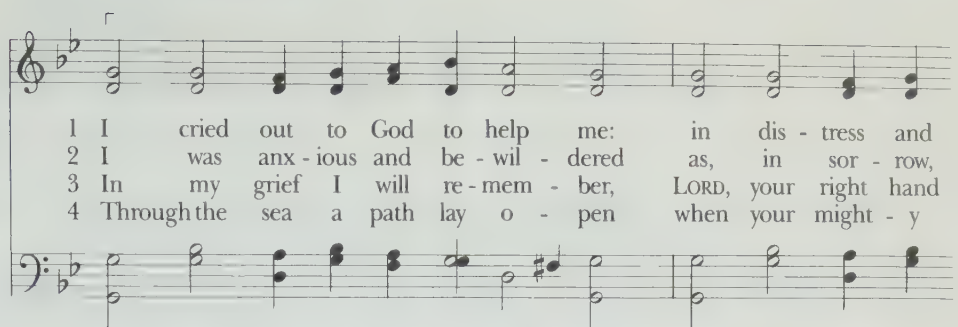
Tune: Louis Bourgeois, 1551; harm. Dale Grottenhuis, 1985. Harmonization © 1987, CRC Publications

LM
 GENEVAN 100

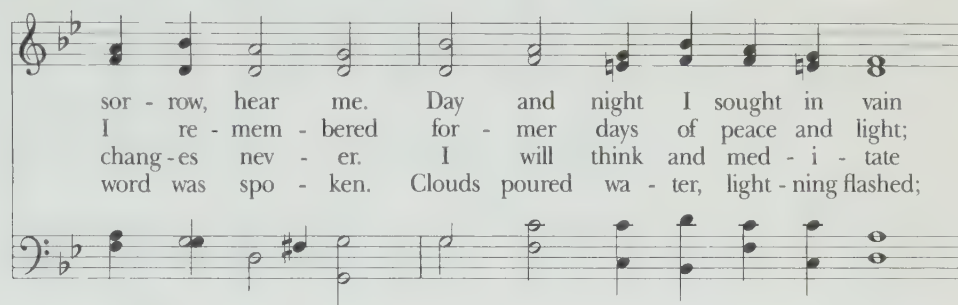
1 Bab - y - lon streams re - ceived our tears: Zi - on, the
 2 Our cap - tors laughed, "Per - form your praise! Mer - ri - ly
 3 So help us, God, you may de - stroy our work - ing
 4 Re - mem - ber, LORD, the aw - ful day vi - o - lent
 5 God give you e - vil for re - ward. Blest be the

ho - ly cit - y, gone. Ex - iles, we cried be -
 dance, Je - ru - sa - lem!" How could we chant the
 ▶ hands if we de - ny— strike our mouths mute if
 E - dom cursed your folk: "Bab - y - lon, break Je -
 one who brings your fall. Bab - y - lon great— your

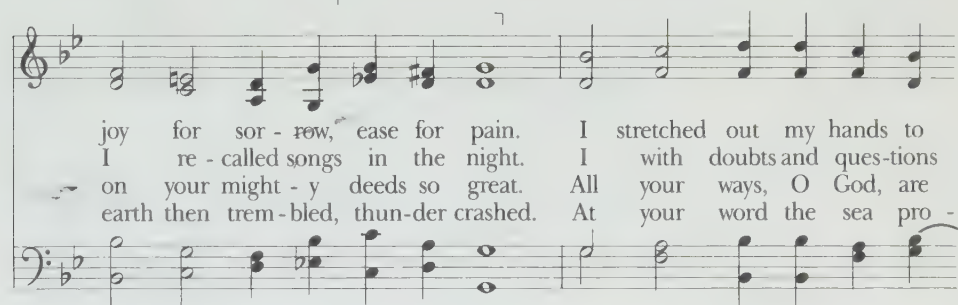
neath the trees. Harps hung in si - lence man - y years.
 LORD God's songs while we were crushed by hea - thens' ways?
 ▶ we ne - glect to make your cit - y our chief joy.
 ru - sa - lem! Raze to the ground, strip her a - way!"
 seed be smashed! Ven - geance shall come from God our LORD.



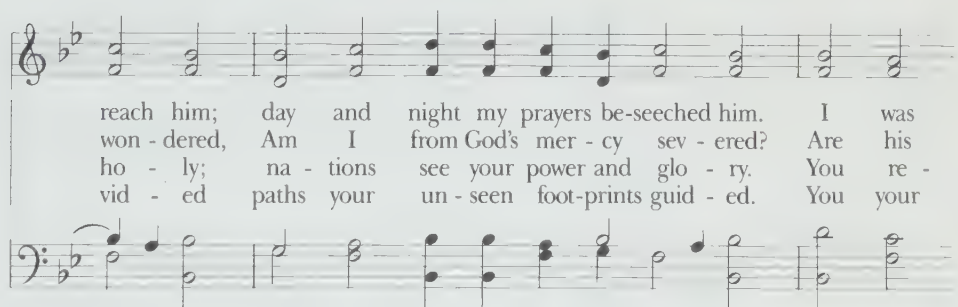
1 I cried out to God to help me: in dis - tress and
 2 I was anx - ious and be - wil - dered as, in sor - row,
 3 In my grief I will re - mem - ber, LORD, your right hand
 4 Through the sea a path lay o - pen when your might - y



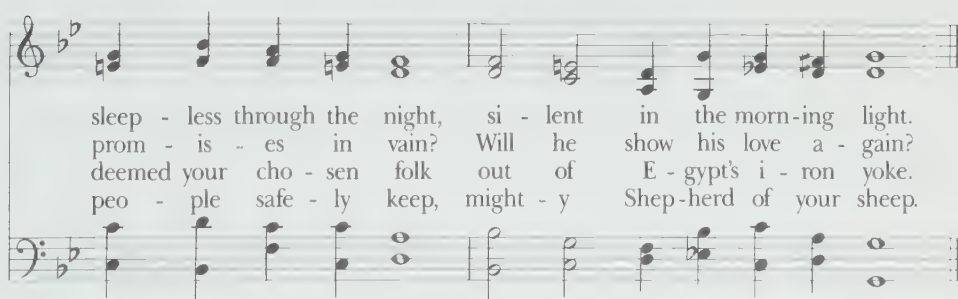
sor - row, hear me. Day and night I sought in vain
 I re - mem - bered for - mer days of peace and light;
 chang - es nev - er. I will think and med - i - tate
 word was spo - ken. Clouds poured wa - ter, light - ning flashed;



joy for sor - row, ease for pain. I stretched out my hands to
 I re - called songs in the night. I with doubts and ques - tions
 on your might - y deeds so great. All your ways, O God, are
 earth then trem - bled, thun - der crashed. At your word the sea pro -



reach him; day and night my prayers be - seached him. I was
 won - dered, Am I from God's mer - cy sev - ered? Are his
 ho - ly; na - tions see your power and glo - ry. You re -
 vid - ed paths your un - seen foot - prints guid - ed. You your



sleep - less through the night, si - lent in the morn - ing light.
 prom - is - es in vain? Will he show his love a - gain?
 deemed your cho - sen folk out of E - gypt's i - ron yoke.
 peo - ple safe - ly keep, might - y Shep - herd of your sheep.



1 Hal - le - lu the LORD our God! Praise him in his
2 Praise God with the trum - pet blast! Crash your cym - bals,

ho - ly place. Praise him in the skies he rules; praise him
laugh with dance! Praise with flute, with drums and strings! Ev - ery

for his sov - ereign - ty; praise his o - ver - whelm - ing
crea - ture that has breath, cel - e - brate un - til the

gran - deur. Ev - ery crea - ture far and near, make your joy - ful
earth rings: Hal - le - lu the great I AM! Hal - le - lu the

noise and cheer: hon - or, glo - ry, praise the LORD God!
wor - thy Lamb! Hal - le - lu the LORD our Sav - ior!

Evaluation Form

You can play a valuable part in the revision process of *Bible Crossroads* by completing this form and mailing it to our office. Thank you.

Some things I appreciated about the *Crossroads* materials:

Some things I found difficult to use:

~~Some~~ additions I made on my own:

Some suggestions for revisions:

Name

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Bible Crossroads
Honest to God
Education Dept.
2850 Kalamazoo SE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49560

BIBLE WAY

Selections for Junior High Students

Goals of the Junior High Program

1. To encourage students to reflect on their own relationship to Christ and how that relationship affects their daily activities.
2. To acquaint students with great biblical themes (such as kingdom and covenant), equipping them with Bible study skills, helping them practice biblical teachings, and encouraging them to develop good Bible reading habits.
3. To acquaint students with the history and faith of the church, helping them acquire and use a basic "faith vocabulary" common to the Reformed tradition, enabling them to see the relationship between doctrine and life, and encouraging them to participate fully in the life and work of the church.
4. To help students deal with such critical areas as identity, freedom, responsibility, authority, morality, faith, and ethics—all within an integrated biblical, confessional, and historical framework.

Bible Crossroads

The material for seventh and eighth graders consists of eight short courses (twelve lessons each) that feature student books used in class (homework is optional as a follow-up to the weekly lesson). When completed in 1989-90, the *Crossroads* series will include:

Honest to God: A Study of the Psalms
A.D.: A Study of Church History
Believe It or Not: A Study of Prophecy
Live It! A Study of James
Family Ties: A Study of the Covenant
One of a Kind: A Study of Identity
Fit to Follow: A Study of Discipleship
The King and I: A Study of the Kingdom

Other Junior High Courses

The Church Cares: Belonging to God's Family
The Church Serves: Working in God's World

These two courses (twelve lessons each) use softcover student textbooks and require fairly extensive homework prior to each class session. The two courses complement each other by presenting a study of the worship and work of the church. The first, *The Church Cares*, examines the impact of the church on the life of young members through its sacraments, worship, creeds, instruction, and care; and the second, *The Church Serves*, highlights the church's activity in today's world and challenges young people to participate in the church's ministry to others.

A Sure Thing: What We Believe and Why (recommended for grades 8-10)

This twenty-four lesson course uses a hardcover student textbook and requires fairly extensive reading and homework (including vocabulary memorization) prior to each class. Using a unique devotional format, it seeks to systematically teach the language (terminology) and basic truths of the Christian faith as understood in the Reformed tradition and as summarized in Scripture and in the Reformed Confessions.

Bible Way Curriculum

CURRICULUM FOR CHILDREN

4-year-olds	Threes	Introduces children to church education through 52 Bible stories
4- & 5-year-olds	Bible Footprints	Teaches Bible stories and truths to help children understand experiences in their world
grades 1 & 2	Bible Steps	Teaches Bible stories and truths to help children explore relationships with God and others
grades 3 & 4	Bible Trails	Focuses on redemptive history, God's mighty acts from Genesis through Acts
grades 5 & 6	Bible Guide	Studies God's revelation and our response, leading students toward commitment

COURSES FOR YOUTH AND ADULTS

	<i>Biblical Studies</i>	<i>Church and Doctrine</i>	<i>Christian Living</i>
grades 7-8	The King and I Believe It or Not Family Ties (1989)	A. D. The Church Cares The Church Serves	Honest to God Live It! (1989) Follow Me (1989) One of a Kind (1989)
grades 8-10		A Sure Thing Bible Landmarks	
High School and Young Adults	Voices	What We Believe Reasons Welcome	Decisions Faith Talk Can I Call After Midnight (1989)
Adults	They Shall Be My People Revelation Series 5 on 1 Intensive Bible Studies	A Place to Stand To All Generations Into His Presence	Beyond Doubt Covenant Keeping Space for God Witnessing Among Friends (1989)

CURRICULUM FOR PERSONS WITH MENTAL IMPAIRMENTS

Youth and Adults	Friendship Series	Uses a unique model combining group presentation and one-on-one tutoring to help students learn some of the fundamentals of the faith, includes lessons on God, our Father; Jesus, our Savior; and Jesus' Spirit, our Helper
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P8-BWL-345

